DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 267 EC 309 110

AUTHOR	Roach, Virginia
TITLE	Winning Ways: Creating Inclusive Schools, Classrooms and Communities.
INSTITUTION	National Association of State Boards of Education, Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE	1995-05-00
NOTE	51p.; Written with Jane Ascroft and Andrew Stamp. Edited by David Kysilko.
AVAILABLE FROM	NASBE Publications, 1012 Cameron Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 ($12 plus $2 shipping and handling). Tel: 800-220-5183 (Toll Free).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Change Strategies; *Disabilities; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Involvement; *Inclusive Schools; Parent School Relationship; Program Development; Program Implementation; Regular and Special Education Relationship; Social Integration; Special Education Teachers

ABSTRACT

This guide looks at implementation of principles of inclusive schools from the perspectives of parents, teachers, district and school administrators, and policymakers and is based on data from interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Each perspective is represented in a different chapter of the report, with implications or recommendations for the various stakeholders. An introductory chapter briefly reviews the history of educational services for children with disabilities as well as the impetus behind inclusion efforts, a general description of inclusive schooling, and the problem of overidentification of children of color in the current special education system. A chapter on district-wide planning, policies, and administration for inclusion focuses on the roles of local school districts and Boards of Education. Emphasis is on planning for inclusion, different methods of implementation, and communicating with parents, the community, and teachers. Chapter 3 focuses on the teacher's role in planning and preparing for inclusion, teacher training, and making inclusion work in the classroom. The last chapter addresses the family's role in creating inclusive schools especially in leadership, planning, and constant communication with school officials. (Contains 52 references.) (DB)

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WINNING WAYS:

Creating inclusive schools, classrooms and communities

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WINNING WAYS:

Creating inclusive schools, classrooms and communities

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National Association of State Boards of Education
May 1995

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Additional copies of *Winning Ways: Creating Inclusive Schools, Classrooms and Communities* are available for $12.00 each + $2.00 shipping and handling (pre-paid) from NASBE Publications, 1012 Cameron Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, (800) 220-5183.

Other Special Education publications available from NASBE include:

- *Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools.* NASBE Study Group Report ($10.00).
- *Issuses & Options in Restructuring Schools and Special Education Programs.* Developed by the Center for Policy Options in Special Education at the University of Maryland ($12.00).
- *Special Education in an Era of Reform.* NASBE Issue Brief ($5.00).

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PREFACE

In the fall of 1990 Walter Esdaile, then President of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), appointed state board of education members from 17 states to the NASBE Study Group on Special Education. The committee's charge was to review the current status of special education, particularly in light of the education reform movement, and make appropriate recommendations to fellow education policymakers. The Study Group members arrived with a wide range of attitudes about special education as it was then being implemented in their states. The membership included lifelong advocates for people with disabilities (often because of a family member with a disability); special education administrators and teachers; board members currently sitting on their state's special education advisory committee; and board members who were avowed representatives of the "average" student. This latter group included those who were upset about the perceived large amount of money going to special education at a time when many local education officials struggle just to keep their districts financially afloat.

Over the next two years the Study Group, chaired by Patricia Hayes of the Colorado State Board and assisted by Dr. Virginia Roach as staff director, researched this issue through a number of means. Members reviewed the literature on special education and school reform; they talked to parents and students with disabilities; they heard from researchers and experts in the field, in state departments of education, and in local communities; they visited special education programs; and they consulted with district administrators and teachers.

As a result of this investigation and the Study Group's deliberations, in October 1992 NASBE released *Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools.* This far-reaching report was based on the belief that all children *can* and *will* learn, and that the dual special education/general education bureaucracies that exist today in most states have hindered collaboration between special and general educators. In addition to outlining the elements of an inclusive philosophy of education, *Winners All* specifically addressed three aspects of the state education system — the state vision for education, changes in teacher training programs to help both general and special educators work with more diverse students, and changes in state finance mechanisms that would sever the links between funding, placement, and student labeling — and made recommendations in each of these areas for building an inclusive system of education that better serves *all* children. Today *Winners All* has been distributed to over 16,000 readers, and it remains a bible for many parents, teachers, advocates, and policymakers across the country who are striving to bring this philosophy of education into their schools.

But while *Winners All* addresses the philosophical and research-based underpinnings for creating inclusive schools, we at NASBE found ourselves increasingly caught up in the day-to-day questions many policymakers, educators and parents have had about actually changing their current dual system of education. How should a district or school bring the issue of inclusion before its parents and teachers? Is it better to create inclusive classrooms grade by grade, school by school, or all at once? How should

teachers — both general and special educators — be trained and prepared for teaching in inclusive classrooms? What can parents or teachers faced with reluctant district officials do to promote inclusion? Or conversely, how should administrators faced with reluctant teachers or worried parents overcome fears of change?

To help educators and policymakers answer these and other questions about inclusion, *Winning Ways: Creating Inclusive Schools, Classrooms, and Communities* looks at implementation from a variety of perspectives, including parents, teachers, district and school administrators, and policymakers. Each perspective is represented in a different chapter of the report, with implications or recommendations for the various stakeholders. *Winning Ways* is largely based on the data gathered through a series of interviews, surveys, and focus groups of educators, advocates, parents, and students. The field data was gathered in order to develop a clearer picture of how inclusion is being implemented today and to find out, more specifically, how to create inclusive schools, classrooms, and communities.

Finally, we would like to re-emphasize that while this book, like *Winners All*, originated in a study of special education, we hope that it will be read by and be helpful to all those who are involved in education: from national, state and local policymakers to teachers, administrators, and parents. It is intended for those who are currently implementing inclusion or who are planning to do so, as well as for those who are studying the possibility of implementing inclusive classrooms in their district or school. Above all, it has been written for all students across the country who will benefit from an education that is based on their individual needs rather than where they fit in the system.

I. INTRODUCTION: CREATING THE CONTEXT FOR INCLUSION

While the term "inclusion" has only come into standard usage among educators over the last several years, some schools and teachers have been "including" students for years. This chapter takes a brief look at the history of the nation's efforts to provide an education for children with disabilities — and how successful these efforts have been — in order to provide a context for the current movement. The sections cover the impetus behind inclusion efforts, give a general description of inclusive schooling, and look at the special problem of the overidentification of children of color in the current special education system.

Despite the federal mandate that students with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment," special education as practiced in the United States is built on a concern for access and process. The top priorities for the coalition of advocates behind P.L. 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act) were getting disabled children and youth who were out of school into school; ensuring that children who were in school were receiving appropriate services; and guaranteeing a fair process in designing programs for individual children. However, as in all other aspects of schooling, less attention was paid to monitoring the outcomes of instruction.

During the late 1980s, as states struggled with general education reform, they also began questioning the effectiveness of their special education systems. Some of the major issues that have been raised over the last decade by parents and others involved with special education include the following concerns:

- that a disproportionate number of minority students are being placed in special education;
- that too many students overall are being placed in special education (during the 1976-77 school year 3.7 million students were served, while in 1991-92 almost 5 million students were served under IDEA, Part B and Chapter 1 of ESEA-state operated programs);
- that students are unnecessarily labeled in order to "fit" into the system;
- that labeling leads to educating students in overly segregated settings;
- that over the last twenty years special education has evolved into a separate system — critics point to the body of rules and regulations, the separate funding streams, special facilities, and separate teacher training and licensure programs as attributes of this "separate system";
- that in lean budgetary times, the escalating costs of special education are beginning to eat into the general education program;
- that educators do not regularly provide substantially different methods of instruction depending on individual students' needs; and
- that students have their curricular options limited based on their handicap label.

The Special Education "Trap"

The reality today is that for many students (and teachers), a referral to special education is the only mechanism available to school officials for providing extra support to students who need it. Many schools provide only two types of instruction: general instruction and special instruction. General instruction usually relies on traditional methods of imparting knowledge, with a teacher in front of the class telling the class what they need to know and testing students afterward on what they have memorized. In such situations the responsibility for learning rests entirely on the student; that is, it's the student's fault if he doesn't understand the material. For students who do not learn using these traditional approaches to instruction, the teacher (under pressure to "cover" an ever increasing amount of material) is left with but one option — refer the student

to special education. In this scenario, special education offers an opportunity for remediation and varied classroom instruction, usually taking place outside of the general education classroom.

Similarly, many schools only provide one type of curriculum, and coming on the heels of the "back to basics" movement of the mid-1980s, that curriculum is typically focused narrowly on education goals specifically related to "core" academics — to the exclusion of other spheres of student development. For students who may have other curricular needs related to functional living skills or social or emotional development, the teacher (again under pressure to cover more material) feels "trapped" with but one option — referring these students to special education. In this scenario, special education offers an opportunity to enrich the curriculum beyond basic academics or pursue alternative curricula, if appropriate.

In both instances cited above, special education is the only option for students who may require help to receive the support they need in order to succeed in school. However, with the special instruction comes the stigma of being labeled in special education, segregation from the general education population and, for many students, a feeling that they no longer belong in the "regular" school.

These concerns have led educators, parents and policy leaders to explore options for restructuring programming for students with special needs with an eye toward **defining and improving student outcomes**. They are looking closely at the efficacy of special education instructional models and student outcomes, and exploring options for instruction outside of the "special education system." Many have come to believe that implementing an inclusive philosophy of education in their schools is not only the best approach for students with disabilities, but the best approach for all students.

What is Inclusion?

At its core, inclusion means that students attend their home school along with their age and grade peers. It requires that the proportion of students labeled for special services be relatively uniform for all of the schools within a particular school district and that this ratio reflects the proportion of people with disabilities in society at large. To the maximum extent possible, included students receive their in-school educational services in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support. As stated by the NASBE Study Group (1991):

> An inclusive system of education is based on the needs of the *whole* student and not merely the academic achievement of the central band of "average" students. Incorporated within this model is the underlying philosophy that education should be germane and relevant for each student, encompassing at the least three spheres of development: (1) the academic...; (2) the social and emotional...; and (3) personal and collective responsibility and citizenship.

Inclusion is not just a place or a method of delivering instruction. It is a philosophy of supporting children in their learning that undergirds the entire system. Inclusion is a part of the very culture of a school or school district and defines how students, teachers, administrators and others view the potential of children. Inclusion is truly grounded in the phrase, "*all children can learn.*"

Hence, inclusion has implications for how schools are organized and restructured, the curriculum, instruction, teacher training, and the types of materials and instructional technology used in the school. In fact, many schools have become inclusive schools when they restructured under current school reform efforts. In inclusive schools, students are not automatically pulled out of class for instruction after they qualify for special services. In inclusive schools students receive the support they need in the general education classroom to the maximum extent possible. Inclusion is based on a presumption of starting with the "norm" and then making adaptations as needed, rather than focusing on the "abnormal" and trying to "fix" disabilities to make students fit into an inflexible "norm."

For example, Andy is a mildly retarded thirteen-year-old in the eighth grade. During the social studies block, the students are studying medieval history. As a culminating activity to the unit, the students are preparing for a medieval feast day in which students will share with one another the particular aspect of medieval life that they are studying. One group of students is researching the dress of medieval times and the link

between socio-economic status and the apparel of the time period. Another group is researching the crusades, their relationship to religion, the economic structure of the Church, and the impact of the crusades on Middle Eastern cultures. Still another group is reading sonnets in preparation for writing their own.

Andy is in the group studying sonnets. He listens intently as other students read aloud their sonnets. He has memorized one and presents it now. Next, the teacher explains the basic elements of a sonnet to the students and the group begins its work. Andy starts to write. In accordance with his Individual Education Plan (IEP), Andy will write a story about the time period, focusing on a beginning, middle and end. He stops when he doesn't know how to spell "gallop." Susan, sitting next to him, spells the word and he continues.

Celia, a girl with cerebral palsy, is in the group that is studying the link between apparel and socio-economic status. After reviewing a passage from a book that she found in the library, she asks Mohammed if he will remove the book from her wheelchair tray so that she can use the keyboard that is mounted on the tray to begin writing her report. As Mohammed moves the book he asks her about the role of a villian in feudal society. Celia types out the answer for Mohammed and then begins her essay.

In this scenario, both Celia and Andy are included in the curriculum and remain with their peers, but their assignments, *or how those assignments are completed,* are adapted to meet their needs and IEP specifications. In inclusive environments, the presumption is that all children will have access to the rich, "general" education curriculum and that the curriculum will be adapted to the individual needs of students.

Research to Support Inclusion

Within the past several years a growing body of research has emerged supporting the benefits of

Mission Statement for the Integration of Special Education Students
Montgomery County Public Schools, Virginia

Integration Is:

The merger of special and regular education into one unified system structured to meet the unique needs of all students.

Our Rules:

- We accept the responsibility for the success of every student.
- We believe in the inherent dignity and worth of each individual.
- We believe every student can learn.
- Projecting a segregated attitude within an integrated setting will not work.
- What we are doing is consistent with what we want, believe, and know about children and educational best practice.

Five-year Instructional Plan Goals for Special Education:

To provide integrated home-school placement for special education students whenever possible in order to educate all students in the least restrictive environment and to expand the quality and opportunities of instruction to all students in Montgomery County Public Schools.

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inclusion for students with disabilities (as well as for those not labeled), for parents of students with disabilities, for teachers, and for the school environment overall. As reported by McGregor (1993):

- Students with disabilities in inclusive settings have been shown to acquire social and communication skills previously undeveloped in segregated placements; they also show increased levels of student interaction, increased interaction with peers, and positive postschool adjustments. In addition, included students show increased achievement of IEP objectives, as well as higher quality IEPs developed for students in inclusive settings.

- As a result of inclusion, parents of students with disabilities also experience a wider circle of friends; they also develop a more positive set of parental expectations for their children.

- Benefits for the general student population include acquiring more accepting attitudes about people with disabilities, more positive attitudes about their peers with disabilities, increased tolerance of other people, and a reduced fear of people who are different. In addition, research has shown improvement in the self-concept of the general student population in an inclusive environment and the development of problem-solving skills applied to real life situations.

- Inclusive teachers have been shown to have a greater ability to accept, implement and be open to change, an increased level of professional confidence, improved planning skills, and an increased awareness of all students' needs.

- Finally, inclusive schools have been found to be more outcome-based and have a more cooperative and collaborative environment, with teachers using active learning procedures for all students.

The Current Status of Inclusion

Over the past several years, due to the advocacy of parents, teachers, policymakers and adults with disabilities, the philosophy and practice of inclusion has spread to school districts across the country. Just how many schools are inclusive schools and how many students with disabilities are included in the general education program is unknown. This is due to several reasons. First, national data reported to Congress each year on the status of special education programming is based on student placement data that is 1-2 years old. Given the rapid expansion of inclusion, even a year lag can mean very different rates of implementation. Second, the percentage of class time spent in "regular education academic classes" reported in the latest *Annual Report to Congress* (U.S. Department of Education, 1994) uses the maximum category of "more than 50%" class time in regular education classes. This leaves a wide margin of definition (from 50-100%) for inclusion. In addition, due to the varying definitions of inclusion used by educators in the field, self reported data by districts or schools would be very unreliable. That is, a high school student who attends regular classes for four periods a day with no support and one period each day in a learning disabilities resource room may be counted by one district as being included, while another would cite the lack of supports and services in the general education classroom as not inclusive. Therefore, it would be very difficult even to conduct a national survey to determine the extent to which inclusion is being implemented in schools.

Although researchers are unable to report exactly how many districts are inclusive, it is apparent that inclusion has entered the mainstream of educational policy and debate over the past five years. Evidence of the growing influence of inclusion can be found in the plethora of features and articles about special education and inclusion in popular and professional journals, magazines and television programs over the past three years. Special education and inclusion have been featured in *The New York Times, U.S. News and World Report, The New Republic,* featured on television shows such as *Turning Point,* and is even the subject of a book in the popular children's collection "Little Critter," by Gina and Mercer Mayer. In addition, many state officials are searching for ways to alter special education funding mechanisms to remove any incentives in those systems for segregated services (Parrish, 1994).

As with any reform that sweeps the entire nation, the implementation of inclusion has been uneven. In some districts students, families and educators have worked together to implement a solid program of instruction for all students. Many of these success stories

have been documented in films such as *Educating Peter* and *Regular Lives* and in the research literature. However, in some districts inclusion has been poorly implemented, resulting in lost funding to support students' needs, parents feeling alienated from teachers and school officials, teachers feeling unsupported and scapegoated for poor student outcomes, and students feeling frustrated and unwelcome in the general education classroom.

While many parents have worked well with districts to develop a comprehensive plan of support to have their children included, parents have also reported stark resistance from districts, leading to due process hearings and, at the extreme, court cases such as *Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland.* In that case the school district spent tens of thousands of dollars in its attempt to block the inclusion of a moderately retarded 11-year-old girl into the regular classroom. Other parents have reported parent conferences where they are made to feel as if they are unfit parents because they want their children included in the general education program.

Through improper implementation, some district officials have interpreted inclusion as "dumping" all students with disabilities into the general education classroom with no additional support, planning or training for teachers and students. In these instances teachers have been overwhelmed with the responsibility of working with large numbers of students with disabilities with no in-class support, no assistance in adapting instruction to meet the needs of the special students in their class, and no time to plan and coordinate in-class activities with special educators who may have worked with the student in the past. Teachers in these schools feel betrayed and stressed, while student achievement plummets.

At the district level, many district officials who have worked to avoid unnecessary referrals to special education through pre-referral classroom interventions or who have been able to successfully provide supports and services to students with disabilities in the general classroom environment have been rewarded for their efforts by seeing state reimbursements for special education reduced or eliminated. Hence, educators are left with the choice of providing inclusive services with inadequate financial support, misrepresenting their program to state officials and auditors to maintain the appearance of segregated programming for reimbursement purposes, or simply returning to a segregated program in order to maintain the level of fiscal support needed.

Representation of Students in Special Education as Opposed to Representation in the Total School Population[1]

	Native American	Asian	Hispanic	African-American	Caucasian
Representation in Total Population	1%	3%	12%	16%	68%
Percent Labeled Gifted & Talented	1%	6%	6%	8%	79%
Percent Labeled Educable Mentally Retarded	1%	1%	8%	35%	56%
Percent Labeled Trainable Mentally Retarded	1%	2%	20%	32%	46%
Percent Labeled Seriously Emotionally Disturbed	1%	1%	6%	22%	71%
Percent Labeled Specific Learning Disability	1%	1%	11%	17%	70%

[1]From U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 1990 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey Adjusted National Estimated Data (February 1993).

The challenge for educators, families and policymakers is to create the systemwide changes that are needed to support inclusion (such as changes in school philosophy and placement options for students, special education finance, and personnel preparation) while ensuring at the building and classroom level inclusion is implemented properly.

Overidentification of Students of Color

One other aspect of the current special education system merits particular attention: for years parents and advocates for students of color have decried the disproportional representation of students of color, particularly African-American boys, in special education. According to the 1990 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey, while African-American children make up about 16% of the total school population, they comprise 32% of the students labeled Trainable Mentally Retarded, 35% of the students labeled Educable Mentally Retarded, 22% of the students labeled Seriously Emotionally Disturbed and only 8% of the students labeled gifted and talented. This is in contrast to white students who make up 68% of the total student population but comprise only 46% of those labeled trainable mentally retarded, 56% of those labeled educable mentally retarded, 71% of those labeled emotionally disturbed and fully 79% of those labeled gifted and talented. (See Table on page 10.) Hence, **African-American children are twice as likely to be found in classrooms for students with mental retardation and only half as likely to be found in classrooms for the gifted and talented**.

Not only are students of color overrepresented in significant areas of disability, the categories in which they are overrepresented, i.e., categories of mental retardation, are the very categories in which children are most likely to receive their education in a separated class or school setting. Over the past several years, researchers have noted an overall shift of students from the category mentally retarded to the category learning disabled. Given the current rates of identification for students, it appears that the movement of students from the mental retardation category to the learning disabled category may have been a migration of the *white students* to the latter category, leaving their non-white counterparts behind.

Equally as troubling are the disproportionate numbers of students with significant disabilities who are not included. In many districts researchers, advocates and other stakeholders are concerned that students with severe disabilities who are also of color will not be included into the general program to the extent that white students are. For example, in examining it's current situation, a southern California school district that is generally known to be supportive of inclusion has found that while students of color comprise 65% of the total school population, they represent only 37% of the students with significant disabilities who are included. The following table gives the district's breakdown of the included students according to their race/ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	% Total District Population	% Students in Severely Disabled Category Included
African American	16%	8%
Latino	29%	22%
Asian/Pacific Islander	19%	7%
Native American	1%	0%
White	35%	63%

While African-American students are twice as likely to be labeled mildly mentally retarded, in this district those African-American students labeled severely disabled are only half as likely to be included. Unfortunately, observers see this phenomenon being repeated in districts across the country. For many children of color, special education is tantamount to the inadequate separate but equal education system that was outlawed by the Supreme Court in 1954.

In contrast, many students who would have been labeled and sent into separate placements are now receiving the support they need in the general education classroom through inclusion. As one inclusive education teacher noted,

> Inclusion doesn't work for everyone. But my concern is that minority males are going into special education classes because of a lack of sensitivity to cultural differences between the tester and the student. The minute a kid didn't sit quietly, [instead of] finding out what excites the kid — special education was the first solution. Special education was becoming dumping places for children we didn't know how to excite.

II. DISTRICT-WIDE PLANNING, POLICIES, AND ADMINISTRATION FOR INCLUSION:

The Roles of Local School Districts and Boards of Education

Today, many local districts across the country are moving toward a district-wide commitment to inclusion. In district-wide initiatives, inclusion permeates everything that a district does, from hiring teachers and administrators to central planning processes and budgeting, teacher training programs, and interactions with the community. In providing an overview of inclusion from the perspective of the local school district, this chapter will cover:

- *Initiating the move toward inclusion at the district level;*
- *Planning for inclusion;*
- *Inclusion from the perspective of the board of education;*
- *Different methods for implementing inclusion;*
- *Communicating with parents and the community;*
- *Communicating with teachers;*
- *Responding to opposition to inclusion; and*
- *Implications of inclusion for school districts.*

It should be noted that even in districts that have embraced a district-wide philosophy of inclusion and have generally disbanded separate special education facilities and classrooms, ***there still exist instances where, because of some individuals' particular needs, these students are not served in their neighborhood school, in age-appropriate classrooms.***

GETTING STARTED

The actual impetus behind implementing inclusion in a community is as varied as the number of school districts. Some districts arrive at inclusion as the next step in an evolutionary process. In these cases, special educators and advocates may have been working toward greater integration — and finally inclusion — of students with disabilities for some time. The special educators have slowly moved from segregated facilities to wings of "general" facilities to resource rooms to general education classrooms. Or, in cases where the district's educational philosophy has moved away from tracking students, including students with disabilities in an untracked school becomes, for them, the next logical step.

Other districts have moved more abruptly to an inclusive program. This may partly be based on a growing culture for change in the district, as well as on other special education-related activities already underway. Some districts have relied on internal change-agents, others on external forces for change. For instance, some districts moved toward inclusion as the result of a court mandate or in response to ongoing special education litigation. In other districts, an evaluation of the existing special education program was the impetus for creating an inclusion initiative. As one central office administrator said, "We thought we were doing a great job in special education until we interviewed parents as part of our districtwide evaluation of special education."

Still other districts have arrived at inclusion as a matter of logistics. That is, as regional facilities are closed, as "general" education students have become more diverse in ability, and as principals look for ways to reorganize their schools to provide the greatest support they can for children, they have looked to inclusion

as a way to meet a variety of needs of all students in the district. In these districts, administrators point to the logic that inclusion and good teaching are good for all students — not just for those with disabilities.

Finally, although district administrators and boards of education may quibble as to which entity within the district was the impetus behind the move toward inclusion (since everyone wants to take credit for inclusion when it is successful), few district representatives will dispute the strong role parents have played in promoting inclusion. Even in those districts where administrators and board members generally describe an internal change strategy, parents are cited as placing pressure on the system to accommodate their individual child in an inclusive class. Some administrators credit the partnership between parents and committed teachers for moving the system forward.

PLANNING FOR INCLUSION

Once a district decides to move toward inclusion the planning process begins. Most districts have found that creating an opportunity for staff and community dialogue is critical in the planning stages. Again, districts create this dialogue in different ways: through task forces, educational sessions, public forums, and individual meetings with parents and students.

Many districts begin the "dialogue" process by sponsoring forums for discussion of the issues. These forums are typically held separately for parents and community members, teachers, and district administrators. That is, the districts will begin by discussing inclusion at the superintendent and central office level, then move to discussing inclusion during the district principals' meeting. Next, the district sponsors a series of meetings for teachers and for the public about inclusion. Teachers' meetings are either held school-by-school or district wide, usually with representatives of the district present at the meetings. Public forums are usually held on the district level, with invited comments from parents, the public at large, local teachers' organizations, and other interested stakeholders.

The purpose of these forums is to allow parents, teachers and other stakeholders an opportunity to ask questions and discuss their concerns, interests and vision for inclusion in the district. Successful forums are organized as an open dialogue, rather than a district "briefing session." These sessions are not framed as "Can we have an inclusive district?" but rather, "How can we have an inclusive district?" Generally, the district will make a considerable effort to ensure that large numbers of teachers and parents — both from special education and general education — attend these sessions. Some districts report holding separate teacher and parent forums at each school building in the district to ensure that as many parents, teachers and community members as possible contribute to the discussion on inclusion.

Many districts have appointed "inclusion task forces" to study the issue, initiate public dialogue, and develop a plan for implementation. Sometimes these task forces are composed of parents, teachers, administrators, students and other stakeholders. In other instances, these task forces have been composed entirely of teachers connected with the local bargaining unit. In those districts where inclusion is being implemented district wide, the task force was typically headed by the district superintendent. That is, inclusion was not seen as a "special education" program, but rather a district-wide initiative for *all* children. Even in those districts that have recently appointed inclusion task forces within the division of special education, great care is taken to ensure that school board members, parents, teachers and administrators from general education are well represented.

In addition to initiating a public dialogue on inclusion, another important early step in the planning process is *educating* district personnel, parents, and others about inclusion. Education includes sending members of the inclusion task force or key representatives from the district, bargaining unit, teachers, school board, and parent groups to visit inclusive schools. Other resources include films and videotapes about inclusion, testimonials from parents and students who have been included, and presentations made by teachers working in inclusive schools. Again, care should be taken to ensure that these education sessions are held both for people who primarily identify with general education and special education.

As one administrator explained, the key to planning in this phase is to start out "strong." That is, make sure the community dialogue is widespread and

comprehensive, ensure that discussion participants have an opportunity to air all concerns and *have them addressed,* and provide examples to parents and teachers of how inclusion has worked in other communities. Most importantly, districts that have successfully moved toward inclusion undertake these planning activities with the attitude that "Inclusion *will* happen!" rather than "Will inclusion happen?"

Yet while planning is important, several administrators at both the district and building level reported that planning can become a delaying tactic, and eventually the district needs to forge ahead and "just do it."

Inclusion from the Board of Education Perspective

Local boards of education are not typically the voice for change toward inclusion. As one local board member reported, "for the vast majority of board members, inclusion is simply not a burning issue." Board members report that they spend the bulk of their time "putting out fires" in relation to dwindling budgets, state mandates, and parent and staff complaints, and often do not have an opportunity to strategically discuss the direction that the district should go in, let alone discuss inclusion. Board members report "not concentrating on special education very much," "not really understanding the issues," or "not really thinking about this at all." In addition, some board members may be leery of "upsetting the apple cart without knowing where things will land."

Because their attention is often drawn away from this issue, few local boards take the lead in sponsoring public input sessions to learn about community perceptions of inclusion. Rather, board members rely on their staff to gather this information and report to the board. Similarly, board members generally rely on their staff to make recommendations as to how to proceed in terms of implementing the reform.

But while local boards of education do not generally initiate a move toward inclusion, they can be instrumental in stopping a district's inclusion initiative. That is why it is essential in the planning process that the superintendent fully discuss the philosophy and implementation of inclusion with the board. If the board is solidly behind inclusion, then as issues associated with bargaining, budgeting or advocacy come before it, the board has a point of reference with which to approach them. Without a firm vision for their schools, the board — and district — will be buffeted by advocacy groups on all sides of the issue.

Half-hearted support or incomplete understanding on the part of the board can also lead to confusion down the road. In one district, the superintendent thought that the only way the board of education would support inclusion was on the basis of cost savings. Therefore, rather than having a thorough discussion about inclusion, the superintendent recommended that the board support a district-wide emphasis on inclusion as a cheaper method of providing special education services. When the special education portion of the district budget was not reduced over a three-year period, board members began looking for "another way to deliver special education cheaper."

On the other hand, when the board of education is solidly behind inclusion, it can deal with issues in a very different manner. For instance, in one district where the board is solidly behind inclusion, the local bargaining unit decided it "wanted to bargain inclusion, including bargaining which classifications of students would be eligible for inclusion, under which circumstances." The board, consistent with past practice, roundly refused to bargain over *any* classification of students, and the bargaining unit removed the issue from the negotiation.

Boards of education can only be truly supportive of inclusion if they are given the opportunity to understand and be involved in the issue. Superintendents and other district administrators who do not keep the board fully informed and involved in the district's plans for inclusion leave themselves vulnerable to having their plans reversed by a board that does not comprehend what the administration is doing or why it is following a certain course of action. Furthermore, boards that do not take the time to fully develop their stance on inclusion can unwittingly sabotage inclusion if their decisions on other issues, such as school construction, curriculum development, assessment, budgeting and bargaining, are not aligned with the inclusive philosophy.

FROM THE DRAWING BOARD TO THE CLASSROOM: IMPLEMENTING INCLUSION

Inclusion spreads through district classrooms at different rates, from very gradually to total district conversions within a few years. In determining which rate and approach to use in their district, planners need to consider how the process for inclusion was initiated locally, what (if any) inclusion programs are already underway, and what are the levels of support and understanding in the community, by the school board, and among staff. This section reviews four distinct approaches for implementing inclusion.

The Case-by-Case Evolutionary Process

Some districts report using an "evolutionary" process — that is, as individual parents request that their children be included into their neighborhood school, the district accommodates the request. The key strength of this approach, as reported by school district officials, is that the transition is very smooth and gradual. Districts report that by including students on a case-by-case basis, teachers and building administrators aren't "scared off" by the change process of converting to inclusive classrooms.

However, the evolutionary process has several drawbacks. Those districts that are using this process are less likely to have discussed inclusion at the board of education level and less likely to have conducted comprehensive communication, education, and personnel training programs than districts that move toward inclusion in a more comprehensive manner. Furthermore, including students in an ad hoc fashion does not force a district to consider how the *system* must be realigned to promote inclusion (that is, how funding mechanisms, testing and grading policies, teacher hiring and evaluation, and staff assignments must be adjusted).

In addition, the evolutionary method favors parents and students that have strong connections to the school and have the resources with which to communicate their needs to school officials. Parents who view school officials as authority figures who should "not be crossed," parents who are unable to communicate their concerns about separate, special education programming to school personnel, or parents who are overwhelmed with day-to-day survival are less likely to make such requests. Said one urban administrator, "if you are worried about whether or not you can get your kids into a shelter for the night or how you are going to come up with enough money to feed your kids, inclusion isn't exactly at the top of your list of things to do today."

Inclusion By Pilot Programs

Next on the continuum are districts that work on inclusion by initiating special pilot programs, usually funded through special project grants. The benefit of this approach, district officials explain, is that the pilot program usually provides district administrators with evaluation data that can be used to "sell" inclusion to the board of education and other stakeholders in the community. In addition, pilot sites can then serve as models for district personnel to visit as part of the education and communication stages of the planning process.

There are some drawbacks to initiating inclusion via specially funded pilot projects. First, specially funded projects are typically initiated by the district special education director and are seen as a "special education" initiative. Thus, it may be difficult to expand the project into a system-wide initiative that would benefit all children. Second, many districts suffer from "projectitis." That is, the district is accustomed to bringing in many special projects and grants for new initiatives, only to see the initiative abandoned when the special funding runs out. This seems to be particularly true of large, urban districts. Superintendents who have initiated special pilot programs with the intent of gradually expanding into district-wide, systemic change have sometimes left the district before such expansion gets underway. Again, this is particularly likely in large, urban districts, where the average tenure of the superintendent is approximately three years. Finally, those districts that have created inclusive schools entirely through special projects are vulnerable to the charge that inclusion can only be successful with the addition of discrete funding, which most districts are unable to afford. (Most districts that have moved toward inclusion actually have not used additional funds; rather, district resources are reallocated to support diverse learners in the classroom.) Nonetheless, for some districts the culture of introducing new initiatives via special projects is so strong that to do otherwise is essentially unfeasible.

The Road to Inclusion in Falls Church, Virginia

Prior to the 1992-1993 school year, the Falls Church, Virginia school system had contracted with neighboring counties to provide special education services to the relatively small number of students in the district labeled moderately and severely disabled. An evaluation project initiated by the school district, however, uncovered a number of parental concerns about why educational services were purchased outside their community for their disabled children, rather than provided within the district. Thus began the discussion of inclusion in this district.

Impelled by the findings of the evaluation project, coupled with the movement nationwide to integrate disabled students into regular classrooms, a Special Education Integration Task Force made up of parents, teachers, and administrators was commissioned to look further into the issue of inclusion. From the beginning, the question considered by this group was not "can we include" students who are moderately or severely disabled, but rather "how do we successfully include" them.

The Task Force recommended that nine students with moderate and severe disabilities be included into the district at the start of the 1992-1993 school year. The Task Force identified some of the drawbacks of the traditional contracting arrangement — ranging from family involvement to control over instruction in other jurisdictions — as well as the benefits of inclusion for both disabled children and their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, the Task Force found that a program of inclusion was "feasible and desirable, given appropriate resources" for the Falls Church district. Committing to inclusion for the long term, the task force report states:

> *Everyone — children, teachers, administrators, policy makers and the citizens of Falls Church — is encouraged to accept the goal of including all our children in our schools and to recognize all citizens of Falls Church, including those who are mentally retarded, as participating members of the community. This is a commitment of philosophy, effort, and resources.*

As in other communities, planning was key to the district's ability to successfully include students who are moderately and severely disabled. Placements were not changed overnight; rather, sufficient time was taken to prepare parents, students, teachers and other school personnel for inclusion. Training was also critical — staff development and inservice as well as disability awareness training for parents, staff, and students.

An evaluation of the inclusion program concluded that students as well as the general school community have benefited greatly from inclusion. In addition, a majority of parents and school staff surveyed by the evaluators had very positive reactions to program.

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The Comprehensive, Phased-in Approach

Many districts "phase in" inclusion in a comprehensive but gradual manner, with the clear understanding that within a certain period of time all students will be offered inclusive, age- appropriate classrooms in the school they would normally attend if they were not labeled for special education.

Districts phase in inclusive classrooms in a variety of ways. In some districts, the central administration asks for principal volunteers to be the district leaders in creating inclusive classrooms. These principals usually work with their staff to determine which teachers in their building would like to be the first to include children with disabilities in their classrooms. Volunteer teachers are offered joint planning time with the specialists with whom they will be working, and in some instances innovative principals have worked to garner special project funds to enhance the classroom program of participating teachers. With these types of positive reinforcements, other teachers usually follow suit and volunteer to participate in future years. Alternatively, some principal volunteers offer staff members who feel they are not ready to create inclusive classrooms an opportunity to transfer to another school with no penalty. For some principals, if members of their staff refuse to accept diverse learners in their classroom, they are inevitably asked to work in another building.

The phased-in approach has been particularly successful in those districts where inclusion was initiated by a superintendent who then left the district and was followed by a less supportive superintendent. In these districts, supportive principals work to maintain inclusion at their individual schools, even if district-level support has evaporated.

In many districts, inclusion is phased in grade by grade, usually starting with prekindergarten and kindergarten and adding the next one to two grades each year. In these cases, all students start school in classrooms of diverse learners and continue in inclusive environments as they progress through their school careers. Teachers and administrators report that with this type of implementation, the general education students themselves become key elements in training teachers as they advance through the grades. That is, the general education students will often know about characteristics and behaviors of individual students with disabilities that they are able to share with teachers in subsequent years. This seems to be particularly the case for students with significant multiple disabilities who may have limited ability to communicate.

Some districts have combined one of the previously mentioned methods with a district policy that any new school opened in the system is opened as an inclusive school. Principals that have opened inclusive schools have reported great success in building a cohesive staff and school culture supportive of inclusion from the school's very inception.

Complete Conversion to Inclusion

Other districts have implemented inclusion on a district-wide basis, making the complete change in a period of one to two school years. These tend to be small or rural districts that are used to operating flexibly, have a small central administration and a very receptive staff and community. In these districts, the administration often has held extensive planning conferences with individual parents of students with disabilities, as this approach equates with a massive "change of placement" for the students in that district.

Regardless of which process districts have used to move from the drawing board to the classroom, several administrators report that inclusion spreads through the district faster than anticipated. That is, as teachers and principals experiment with inclusion in their buildings, as they see positive gains for *all* students in the building, as teachers are reinvigorated in their work, and as the district supports and rewards the efforts of staff in inclusive schools, more teachers and principals want to create inclusive environments.

INVOLVING AND COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

As discussed above, it is important to involve parents and other community members in the planning for inclusion. Yet it is also essential to continue this communication during the implementation. Districts report two primary "tracks" of communication with

parents: communication with "special education" parents and communication with "general education" parents.

For parents of students in special education, district administrators have not only had to attend to the communication and information needs related to inclusion, but also maintain a system of communication and training that was established through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later renamed the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA). That system helps parents understand their role in eligibility, placement, and programming decisions, as well as how to advocate on behalf of their child.

Districts have provided information and training to parents of students with disabilities in a variety of ways, such as special information forums, as well as through the traditional parent training sessions provided to parents of students in special education. For instance, in one school the principal combined a number of categorical programs (including special education; Chapter 1; a pre-school program for children considered at-risk of school failure by virtue of family income, low birth weight, family history of drug abuse or limited proficiency in English; and a day care program for four year olds) to create an inclusive school. The parent training and advisory components of those categorical programs were also combined into a single, school-wide parent training and advisory committee. In some instances, intermediate school districts and cooperative agencies that serve a number of districts provide parent training on both the rights of parents under IDEA and how to work with their neighborhood inclusive school.

Several districts report holding meetings with special education parent advocacy groups, as well as meeting with individual parents, regarding their particular concerns with their child's educational placement and program. In those instances where parents are leery of placing their child in an inclusive setting, especially when their child has been educated for a number of years in a segregated facility, districts often encourage parent-to-parent exchanges with other parents of students served in inclusive schools. As with teachers, school administrators refer to research on heterogeneous grouping versus tracking and the results of early inclusion program evaluations to help parents understand what they are trying to accomplish. In addition to discuss-

Grant Early Childhood Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

A number of diverse preschool and kindergarten programs operating within one facility have been restructured into an array of non-categorical, age-based classrooms for all children at the Grant Early Childhood Center. Formerly a fully-equipped elementary school, Grant was designated three years ago by the school district to become one of two early childhood-only centers in Cedar Rapids. As such, a variety of programs for some four hundred children aged five and under intersect inside a single building. Also on site is a team of specialists, including an occupational therapist, a physical therapist, counselor, and a school psychologist, who support all of the classroom teachers.

The Grant Center's kindergarten classes, alternative kindergartens, preschool classes for at-risk children, early childhood special education, and a child care program functioned separately during the school's first two years of operation, but the newly-developed "ponding" process cuts across programs so that children with disabilities and any other labels are educated with their peers in inclusive classrooms. The term POND (Prizing Our Natural Differences) is used to describe a cluster of age-based inclusive classrooms, a team of teachers, and additional resource staff supporting classes which contain severely disabled students. One of the ponds, for example, includes four units for five-year-olds: three kindergartens and one class of severely disabled students. Under a traditional model the kindergartens might have class sizes of about 25 students each, while the special needs class might contain only six children. At Grant, on the other hand, the disabled students have been blended into classrooms with their non-disabled peers, creating in effect four inclusive "communities" of near equal size.

"The Road to Inclusion Can Be Smooth or Hellish"

The following article, reprinted from School Board News, *covered a panel discussion at the National School Boards Association Annual Conference that reinforced the importance of careful planning and communication when a district begins its move to inclusion.*

"Inclusion is not a policy change, it is a culture change," said Stuart Berger, superintendent of the Baltimore County, MD, school system....Berger joined Mike Izquierdo, board president of the Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso, Texas, and Waldemar Rojas, superintendent of the San Francisco school district, in a panel discussion about the best way to include special education students in the regular classroom. Each stressed the importance of staff and parent training.

When Baltimore Country moved from educating all special education students in separate facilities to allowing parents to choose between a special school or a comprehensive school, the district experienced unexpected opposition from parents, Berger says. Those whose special education children had negative experiences in "regular" education programs did not want their children moved. Other parents feared the "top" special education students would be removed from special schools, thus eliminating role models for other students, he adds. Middle class parents of "regular" students felt special education students would water down the curriculum in the comprehensive schools. When several groups, including the teachers' union, sued the district and talk radio got involved, the district had a crisis on its hands. "It was pure, non-stop hell," he says.

But in San Francisco, Rojas reports, inclusion was implemented "without a peep" because the district worked for two years before the changeover to prepare teachers, administrators, and parents. He says the district first asked the question, "Is the community ready philosophically, emotionally, academically, and politically?"

When the Ysleta school district moved to an inclusion plan two years ago, the watchwords were "educate and communicate," says Izquierdo. The district spent "lots of money" on teacher training, he says.

What educators, parents, and school boards need to understand, says Berger, is the fundamental difference between mainstreaming and inclusion. Mainstreaming starts with the premise that children will be isolated until they demonstrate that they can do more, he says. Inclusion, on the other hand, assumes that the child is going to start out in the regular classroom. Inclusion is a civil rights issue, Berger adds. Every child ought to be given the opportunity to learn and students must be exposed to the differences they are going to find in the world, he says.

School boards also must understand that preparing staff and parents for a change to inclusion is a "process without a destination," says Rojas. Making people comfortable with a new program takes a long time. "You can't expect people to become zealots just because you say, 'this is the policy.'"

Reprinted from *School Board News/Conference Edition*, April 2, 1995, p.5, courtesy the National Schools Boards Association.

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ing placement issues, district officials must carefully plan with parents their students' IEP and adaptations that might be made in goals and objectives, based on a normal school and class placement.

In a few instances, when districts have created a unitary system by substantially restructuring their central office staff to disband dual bureaucracies of special and general education, officials will meet with resistance from special education parent advocacy groups. These groups fear the loss of "their" supervisor or coordinator, "their" classroom or "their" facility. District administrators point out that these complaints generally focus on the *structures* of special education, rather than on the substance of classroom instruction and learning. That is, parents are not, by and large, objecting to the *education* their child is receiving in the inclusive environment or their student's progress. Rather, they are concerned about the dismantling of the special education system itself — the separate teachers, separate facilities, separate supervisors.

As schools "gear up" for inclusion, parents of students with disabilities have been a valuable resource for teachers and principals. These parents have been involved at the building level in planning for inclusion by providing staff briefings about their children and, in some instances, serving on hiring panels for new teachers. In some districts, parents sit with staff committees to determine the best classroom placement for their child as they move through the grades from year to year.

Educating parents of students without disabilities requires a different approach. As mentioned above, even in the very early planning stages, parents of students not labeled for special education should be kept informed and have an opportunity to ask questions and plan for inclusion. Parents of nondisabled students are primarily interested in how including students with disabilities in the regular class will affect their child's learning. In response, district administrators and building principals point to the research on favorable outcomes for nondisabled students in inclusive classrooms. Parents also favorably respond to new staffing patterns for inclusion that often call for special education personnel to follow students with disabilities into the regular classroom to work with all children. This can result in two teachers in a classroom or additional aides in a classroom available to help all children. Hence, all students reap benefits from inclusion.

DISTRICT APPROACHES TO PROVIDING TEACHER TRAINING

As with the board of education, parents and other community members, it is essential that teachers be involved in planning and preparing for inclusion from its very inception. In addition, teachers and administrators point out the need to ensure that training opportunities persist year to year, even after the initial move toward inclusion. But while administrators want teachers, through training and discussion, to "buy into the concept" of inclusion, they also want teachers to understand, as one administrator commented, that "this is the law, not a privilege that kids earn."

District officials described a number of different approaches to training, provided in a number of ways. For instance, some districts have contracted with their regional special education cooperative district to provide teacher training. In some districts the administrators have brought in consultants to discuss a particular facet of classroom management and teaching diverse learners, such as behavior modification or cooperative learning. Some schools appoint a task force composed of general and special education teachers whose responsibility it is to determine what types of training teachers want and need in the school.

In addition to group training sessions, principals also provide individual training opportunities to teachers. Many district administrators report that all new teacher hirees are given training on inclusion (though they are also hired because of the their prior knowledge of working with diverse learners). In some schools principals pair teachers who do not have inclusion experience with those who do. In other schools, principals send interested teachers individually or in small groups to special training seminars sponsored by colleges and universities or by the district or state department of education. Some teachers are provided in-class support and training by a teacher consultant who works in the classroom with the teacher

Murray Elementary School

Murray Elementary School, located in Albemarle County, Virginia, has a unique approach to problem solving that helps account for its success in addressing the learning needs of all students, as well as the staff development needs of its faculty. Characteristics of Murray's approach include an extremely flexible schedule determined by the teachers; parent, student and staff involvement; and issue-driven meeting agendas.

A central feature of Murray's approach is the school's participatory problem-solving process, known as the CARE Committee. When a student is having difficulty (i.e., reading problems, behavior problems, counseling needs, resource needs, etc.), a teacher will bring the student's problem to the attention of the CARE Committee for discussion by all interested parties, including the parent(s), teachers, principal, and the student when appropriate. The committee reviews areas of concern, interventions tried by the teacher, student strengths and weaknesses, and then develops assistance strategies. The strategies focus on teacher and parent needs as well as the needs of the student. Tasks are then delegated for implementation of the strategies. The CARE Committee periodically reconvenes to review the student's progress or for further problem solving.

Weekly staff meetings are designed by teachers to meet teacher and student needs. The agendas are based on student/staff issues rather than administrative concerns. The meetings, organized by grade level or across grade level (depending on the issues), provide teachers with opportunities for research, sharing information, training and problem solving.

According to Murray's principal, "We create more solutions to the problems of our kids when we don't view them or treat them as members of a particular special needs category." All of these characteristics add up to creating a school environment focused on the individual needs of all students and teachers --- a formula for success when it comes to implementing inclusion.

on a day-to-day basis for a short period of time; and some districts are experimenting with including teacher inservice training as a support service on the child's IEP in order to ensure that the needed training is provided to the teacher.

Finally, administrators are also quick to point out that personnel training is not just for teachers. Administrators, related service personnel, paraprofessionals and all other school personnel that work in inclusive schools (food service, janitorial staff, bus drivers) need training in working with students with disabilities.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Districts that have moved toward inclusion work to ensure that funds which previously supported students with disabilities in separate placements are carried with the student back into the general education classroom. In this way, the money improves the regular classroom setting as well, rendering better *value* for the special education dollar.

After implementing inclusion, districts report savings in transportation costs, reduced administrative costs, fewer out-of-district tuitions for other public and private school placements, and savings in space and facility allocations. On the other hand, these costs are directly plowed back into personnel and programming in the inclusive environment. Many inclusive districts have increased the number of classroom aides in general education classes by using the savings gained from eliminating separate special education facilities and administrative structures. Savings reaped by eliminating dual systems have also

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been used to conduct evaluations of the efficacy of inclusion programs.

In those districts using the pilot program approach to implementing inclusive classrooms, the initial costs of these programs may have been picked up by special grants. In other instances, district administrators have redirected discretionary funds from other areas to support the pilot efforts.

As district administrators project the budgetary implications of inclusion, they do so with the understanding that their overall district budget is unlikely to significantly increase in the next several years. Yet administrators hope to reap a greater value for the money spent on special services than they may have in the past. That is, by reallocating dollars toward the classroom and direct service and away from supporting two parallel systems — general and special — in the district, administrators hope that all students will benefit to a greater degree. Also, by utilizing pre-referral interventions and student assistance teams to support teachers and students in the general program, administrators hope to avoid many of the referrals that have been made in the past of students who are "borderline" special education. In fact, districts that have utilized pre-referral, in-class interventions have been able to substantially reduce the number of children referred to special education by providing children support without the special education label.

Some districts report that one unfortunate negative consequence of creating inclusive schools is that they have actually lost substantial amounts of state funding for special education. This seems to be particularly the case in states where students in out-of-state residential placements are brought back to their home district, or when students are not labeled "severe/profound" for services. In addition, those districts that had previously received substantial reimbursements from the state for transportation costs may now save money in transportation when returning to an inclusive, neighborhood school model — yet, they often are not able to recoup the transportation reimbursement from the state to use for other instructional purposes.

The bottom line, then, is that while inclusion is not a cost saving device, districts do report better value for the money spent. In addition, district administrators emphasize that they have created inclusive schools because "it's the right thing to do, and it's the law."

DISTRICT RESPONSES TO INCLUSION OPPOSITION

It frequently seems that any innovation in schools and districts creates opposition, and inclusion is no exception. Such opposition may come from a segment of any group of stakeholders. For example, administrators report opposition from some parents of students with disabilities who fear that their children will not receive the type of special care and attention in a neighborhood school they received in a segregated program or facility. Some teachers are concerned that they will not receive adequate support in the classroom as students with disabilities are reassigned into their rooms. Some special education teachers report concern with how they will fulfill their new roles and whether or not general education teachers will be willing to work with them in the general education classroom. Some principals believe that students with disabilities will disrupt the entire school; and some parents of students in general education are concerned that inclusion will mean that the curriculum will be watered down.

Despite these concerns, district administrators report that most opposition to inclusion is not strong enough to reverse a district's decision to move forward. In addition, districts report that the bulk of opposition to inclusion dissipates once inclusion is actually implemented. That is, opposition is more fear of the unknown and what *might* happen versus what *actually is happening* to students and teachers.

Because inclusion is "change" and is visible, district administrators warn that anything that goes wrong in a school or district may automatically be ascribed to the inclusion initiative by those who are resistant to the change. For example, in one school where the community was concerned about several student outbursts that the school was seemingly unable to control, members of the community ascribed the problem to the fact that the district had included a child labeled severely emotionally disturbed in the school that year. Yet when investigated, the majority of

these outbursts were actually by students not in special education. In another district, a teacher that was having a particularly difficult year assumed that the problem was the presence of students with disabilities in her class. After her class was observed by an inclusion specialist, the specialist determined that the order of the lessons for the day were such that all students in the class were feeling that they could not finish their work. The specialist was able to help the teacher reorganize her classroom schedule to create smoother transitions from one subject to another, and hence keep students with disabilities included in the general class environment.

While administrators stress that inclusion must not become the scapegoat for everything and anything that goes wrong throughout the school year, they also emphasize that parent, teacher, principal and community *concerns about inclusion must be addressed.* In fact, administrators report that those in vocal opposition of inclusion are the very people that the district should ask to participate on inclusion task forces and other planning and implementation committees, and to attend other forums or informational sessions. As one district administrator commented about his experience during the district's planning phase:

> I went to a lot of meetings. They provide you an opportunity to get the message out and dispel the myths. In fact, the more vocal the opposition to inclusion, the more successful we were in "selling the idea." Strong opponents to inclusion generally make exaggerated claims which really play into the hands of people promoting inclusion. Our message was simple: students with disabilities have an absolute right to education in their neighborhood school with their peers. During our forums the general public came to recognize how shut out students with disabilities were from the general education system. Frankly, opponents came off looking like bigots.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN IT'S NOT WORKING?

Not every placement of a student with disabilities works well from the moment the student walks in the general education classroom door. In a very few instances district officials have removed an included student from the general education setting as the first course of action. Many principals say that removing students from inclusive settings should be the option of last resort. Principals report exploring several options, including providing assistance to the classroom teachers through the school-based student assistance team, in-class interventions with consultant support, changing classroom settings, and even changing schools before actually removing a child entirely from an inclusive setting. It should be noted that administrators do expect that a few students will have to be removed from the inclusive environment from time to time, as their needs dictate. However, administrators also report that they expect that the **goal** for *all* students will be a general classroom placement, with support.

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR DISTRICTS TO CONSIDER

As districts move toward inclusion, it is important to remember that inclusion is not a place, it is a way of looking at education that encompasses curriculum and instructional practices, the school culture, organization, and staffing patterns of schools. An **inclusive** school is a **reformed** school that focuses on the strengths, talents and interests of **all** students.

When creating inclusive schools there are several key issues for district and building administrators to consider. Among these are school and district management; the key role of the principal; providing incentives for inclusion; planning; and communication strategies.

- ***Superintendents lay the foundation for inclusion in the district.*** Superintendents are key in providing the structure and foundation to support inclusion throughout the district. Superintendents can establish a climate of inclusion, while giving individual schools the flexibility they need to create inclusive classrooms. Superintendents can further promote inclusion by making sure that all new district personnel — principals, central office staff, teachers, and support and maintenance personnel — are supportive of inclusion, as well as ensuring that existing personnel are well trained in creating inclusive schools. District superintendents can ensure that the community and district

personnel understand that the needs of students with disabilities are a priority by having whomever is responsible for special education at the district level, whether it is a director of special education or the director of pupil support and services, report directly to the superintendent.

- ***Principals are key in actually creating inclusive schools.*** Teachers, parents, and administrators all point to the central role that building principals play in creating inclusive schools. In some districts, principals have become the new "special education supervisors." Successful inclusion principals are also the instructional leaders for programs where cutting-edge models of instruction and curricular adaptations are routinely applied in the school. These principals are strong, innovative leaders who constantly "hustle" for the school. For example, they may seek special education pilot grants that will provide them flexibility and resources to continue the program of inclusion they have already embarked upon or create rewards and incentive programs for teachers who are willing to work together to serve students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Principals in these schools also work hard to help their teachers and involve the community. For example, they offer in-class assistance to teachers, co-teach with teachers and offer to take over a teacher's class so the teacher can observe others. Principals in these schools take a personal interest in all of the students and their families and work to ensure that families feel a part of and participate in school activities. As one teacher in an urban district described,

> Before our current principal came to this school, we had about three parents show up for back-to-school night. Now there is standing room only. He will do anything to get parents to come to school. He picks them up at home, with their kids, and will babysit the kids while the parent meets with the teacher. He also hustles for teachers. He will take your class if you need him to. He encourages us to write for special grants and will take your class while you write the grant. Also, you know, teachers like "stuff." He is constantly looking for special offers from businesses for classroom furniture and supplies.

Principals in these schools work to build a strong, cohesive staff that supports inclusion. They encourage faculty discussions and innovation. As one teacher said, "if we don't like [the principal's] idea, he says, 'okay, you come up with a better one then,' and he means it." Yet these principals also make it clear that if staff members feel unable to work in an inclusive school, they should transfer.

- ***Site-based management provides a window of opportunity for principals to create inclusive schools.*** Administrators report that in many instances site-based management has been the administrative key to creating inclusive schools. It allows the principal to build a cohesive staff and use flexible staffing patterns to structure the school. Site-based management also encourages parents and teachers to be involved and invested in the school and its success. When a school is reformed through site-based management, it has an opportunity to restructure to serve **all** students, which is also the goal of inclusion. Finally, many schools, through site-based management, have created the student assistance teams that have proven effective in providing in-class support to students in need.

- ***Planning is critical in moving a district toward inclusion, and administrators warn not to move too fast.*** Repeatedly, administrators report that planning too quickly or in a slipshod fashion can destroy inclusion in a district before it ever gets off the ground. Planning must be deliberate and comprehensive, taking into account the needs of a variety of stakeholders. However, the message from the board of education and the district administration must be clear: the issue is not ***can*** we implement inclusion, but ***how*** will we implement inclusion. In addition, planning must be ongoing and continue to take into consideration new developments in the district, community and state.

- ***Clear, strong lines of communication are essential in supporting the ongoing success of inclusion, both district wide and in individual school buildings.*** Inclusion is based on collaboration among parents and teachers, teachers and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and parents, teachers and administrators. This type of collaboration takes energy and resources to sustain, but district administrators repeatedly report the necessity of keeping lines of

communication open among all partners. Inclusion task forces can assist in district and building-level communication. District-wide restructuring newsletters and the newsletter of the teachers' organization can also be effective vehicles for communicating with staff. Building administrators also suggest that time to discuss inclusion be set aside during faculty meetings. District officials should not only listen for anecdotal feedback from parents and teachers, but also encourage teachers and principals to gather student feedback and data to support their impressions of how inclusion is working.

Finally, administrators warn that district superintendents should **never** make a promise to parents, principals or teachers that they cannot keep. The success of inclusion is based on the integrity of the district.

- ***Local boards of education can be key actors in creating a district-wide vision for inclusion.*** Although they have not typically taken the lead, local boards of education can play a critical role in creating the vision for inclusion in the district. This includes creating district goals for all students, dismantling dual policies for general education and special education students and teachers, and creating an accountability system that includes all students. Local boards can further support inclusion by supporting site-based management and ensuring that students with disabilities are considered in *all* decisions that the board makes. Local boards play a critical role in ensuring that local bargaining agreements do not violate the letter or the spirit of IDEA by treating students with disabilities as if their educational needs were generic, based on their disability label or severity of disability. Finally, local boards of education can act as advocates for students with disabilities in community settings, especially when board members work with other public agencies, such as mental health and social services, on behalf of students.

III. TEACHERS CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

As in all aspects of education, teachers are critical to helping students succeed in inclusive classrooms. Unfortunately, most practicing teachers today were trained, licensed, and inducted into a dual system of special and general education. This means that the vast majority of teachers in this country have ***only*** *worked in a dual system in which special education teachers focus on compensating for the disabilities of students, while general education teachers focus on the band of "average" students, referring exceptions out to other teachers. Merging the two systems requires that teachers be brought together to learn, plan and share the successes and failures of inclusion.*

Not surprisingly, teachers have had very different experiences with inclusion in terms of the planning process, the training they've received, and on-going support for inclusion and assistance in making inclusion work in their classrooms. Yet even with their varied experiences, teachers generally report very positive attitudes toward inclusion. As one teacher explained, "I was nervous, I had never had a special education course in college. Yet, its the best thing for all kids. We just don't want to go back to the old way."[1]

PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR INCLUSION

As with the administrators in the previous chapter, teachers interviewed for this study described a number of different ways that inclusion was started at their school. In some instances, district initiatives, pilot programs or state grants provided the impetus for inclusion. In other instances, parents advocating for the inclusion of their child or the efforts of an individual teacher who believed in inclusion were the catalyst for the effort. As one teacher described:

> Inclusion began in our school when a special education teacher was trying to get kids included. That teacher had the support of the principal, which makes a big difference. The parents were supportive, too. The principal brought the idea to the entire faculty for input. Gradually the conversation shifted from "what do you think?" to "this school has been chosen as a special pilot site." That announcement was made in June and in September we became an inclusion school. Workshops were offered in the summer for interested teachers, but they were not mandatory.

Although schools initiate inclusion in different ways, special education teachers are generally more knowledgeable about inclusion than their general education counterparts. Often special education teachers have been working with parents who want their children included, have some knowledge of inclusion from professional organizations or, in some instances, have themselves been involved in writing a grant to initiate an inclusion pilot program. Given this, general and special education teachers may vary in their level of training and preplanning experiences — and if these differences are not addressed in planning and training for inclusion, some teachers may be left feeling ill-prepared and resentful. Successful planning models ensure that **all** teachers are included. Often core planning team teachers are used to educate the rest of the staff through presentations on inclusion and direct assistance on including specific individual students. In addition, in schools that are moving toward site-based management at the same time as becoming inclusive schools, the teachers report feeling a greater sense of ownership in the school program overall and feeling more empowered to participate in the planning process.

Similarly, teachers report that successful inclusion should initially be based on voluntary participation, encouragement from the principal and district (not coercion), and decentralized decisionmaking that allows teachers to have "a lot of power to figure out how to make it work at each level." Principals in successful inclusion schools included teachers in the process of

[1] This chapter is based on extensive field interviews with *teams* of general education and special education teachers who have worked together to create inclusive classrooms.

hiring new faculty members and, when pairing teachers to work in teams, respected the specific requests of faculty.

Many schools conduct staff-wide preplanning and education sessions that are sponsored by the district or the building principal. These sessions enable teachers to freely ask questions related to the specific needs of children, disciplinary procedures and staffing patterns. Interestingly, while many district administrators feel that they must provide general education teachers with training sessions to generically describe categories of disability, the questions teachers ask frequently focus on the needs and disabilities of specific students who will be included rather than on generic classes of disability. In fact, it is the ability to see students with disabilities as "individual children first" that teachers report as being crucial to creating an appreciation for inclusion and its potential benefits for all children.

The early planning phases deal with teacher attitudes toward inclusion. Teachers reported apprehension both on the part of general education and special education teachers. Said one elementary school teacher:

> I was so nervous about one of the students included in my classroom, I worried about it all summer; it was overwhelming. The girl's parents were very vocal and involved, which was intimidating. I worried about acting up behaviors (although the other kids act up, too). As it turns out, her acting up behaviors aren't related to her disability — I know how to handle them.

Such fears point out that teachers' apprehensions about inclusion arise not so much from concerns about the philosophy of inclusion, but from concerns and doubts about their own teaching abilities as they relate to specific students. Many teachers are also concerned with how they will be held accountable for the progress of students who have severe disabilities. Principals in successful inclusive schools work through these issues cooperatively with teachers as part of the planning process. Again, training and planning efforts may be best focused on specific teaching and learning situations, rather than broad, philosophical approaches to inclusion and disability awareness.

Similarly, special education teachers may be apprehensive about "giving up their special students." Special education teachers worry that the same level of accommodation will not be provided in the general education classroom. Teachers admit to being "very protective" of students and, in some instances, feel that parents who wanted their children included were, in essence, criticizing their special education teaching abilities.

Successful planning involves discussion of how teachers will work together. In fact, some teachers report that planning to work with another teacher is the hardest part of planning for inclusion. Teachers who work together in teams or co-teach have to determine who will monitor students' progress on their IEPs and who will plan which lessons. In some instances, IEPs must be adapted to be suitable for the general education environment.

One of the major concerns expressed by teachers of older students in inclusive environments is how grades will be determined. Teachers were concerned that an "A" for a student who is mentally retarded may not reflect the same thing as an "A" for a student not labeled, and that this difference may cause confusion among parents and resentment among students. This debate can prove to be very divisive among teachers and should be directly addressed as part of the planning process. In some instances districts have grading policies to address the issue; in other cases the decision is left to the individual school. Such grading issues should be determined on the school and district level (rather than left to individual teachers) to minimize confusion and conflict. Again, as with other aspects of planning, when no prior policy exists teachers should be closely involved with parents and the school administration in determining the school's policy.

Overall, teachers reported that inclusion can be successful in those schools where teacher input is an integral and valued part of the planning process and where teachers are initially allowed an option to participate in inclusive programming in the school. Principals (and parents) who provide teachers latitude to develop classroom programs in a professionally responsible manner empower teachers with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the development of all the children in their classrooms.

> *In the past we had tried to include students on a part-time basis [mainstreaming], but it wasn't until the students were included full time that the kids' and teachers' attitudes changed about who belonged in their class....*
>
> *...At first, I was very hesitant. I wasn't sure what to do. Then I realized, teach them as I teach the other children; just treat them as one of the class, then the other students will too.*
>
> — Two classroom teachers' thoughts on inclusion

TEACHER TRAINING FOR INCLUSION

> *"What kind of training did I need? I needed to sit down with other teachers who have done this...."*
>
> — Classroom teacher

Teachers who are successful in inclusive environments caution against overemphasizing preplacement training. Ironically, although many professional groups, state agencies and local districts have focused on pre-inclusion teacher training, teachers themselves report needing training and support once the students are actually in their classes, rather than before. Similarly, successful inclusion teachers again and again point to the fact that each child is different and so general training is of limited value. Conferencing on individual children before the school year is a must. However, teachers should not expect training of whatever kind to fully prepare them. As one teacher stated, *"[n]o matter how much training you have beforehand, not until you actually jump in and get your hands in it does it [the training] come together."*

In general, teacher training for inclusion covers four areas: site visits; situation-specific problem solving sessions; training sessions that focus on instructional strategies and curricular adaptations for diverse learners; and inservice sessions on the change process itself.

Site Visits

Teachers reported that one essential step in planning for inclusion was observing other classrooms — both inclusive classrooms and the special classes that soon-to-be included students were currently placed in. Many teachers have no mental picture of what it would be like to work in an inclusive setting. Classroom observations and videotapes of inclusive classes are therefore key to providing a frame of reference for teachers. Districts provide varying degrees of support for teachers who wish to observe inclusive classes. Many principals and district administrators establish observation schedules for their participating teachers. But not all teachers have had this opportunity.

> *While we were planning for inclusion I read about an inclusive school in a nearby district that I wanted to observe. My superintendent would not let me make a site visit, but I snuck one in anyway.*
>
> — Classroom teacher

Situation-Specific Problem Solving Sessions

Consistent with the literature on teacher development, teachers report that rather than "front loading" teacher training programs about inclusion, it is more important, after initial training and site visits, to determine their training needs based on their day-to-day experiences once they have actually started their own inclusive classroom. Inservice training then becomes structured problem-solving sessions where teachers work together to identify needed resources and strategies to meet the needs of students in their class.

In addition, principals report restructuring their faculty meetings so that the bulk of the time is spent addressing teacher concerns about individual students and classroom strategies. Other principals have restructured the school's day-to-day schedule to provide

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an opportunity for faculty to meet **every day** to strategize and problem solve as an entire staff. And still other districts have created site teams at each school composed of parents and teachers who jointly problem solve and make recommendations on the training needs of the staff.

Training Focused on Instructional Strategies and Adapting Curriculum

Teachers in inclusive districts are also provided training in specific classroom strategies and instructional techniques to use with diverse learners. These training sessions include curricular adaptations and modifications, but primarily focus on a variety of instructional techniques, such as cooperative learning, peer coaching, and thematic instruction. In addition, administrators in inclusive schools and districts report again and again the importance of providing training opportunities for teachers in behavior management. Districts also report providing disability awareness training, particularly when students with disabilities are first brought back to their home schools. However, this type of training seems, overall, to be less important than sessions that deal with actual teaching strategies and interventions.

Training to Support Change

The fourth category of training activities covers the change process in general. Although this training is less common, some principals arrange for inspirational speakers and experts on the change process to help staff understand and cope with the stress and anxiety connected with restructuring schools and working with diverse student populations. As one principal explained, "We have to care for the caregivers; this [inclusion] is very demanding on the teachers."

MAKING INCLUSION WORK IN THE CLASSROOM

Teacher Planning Time

As with most aspects of school reform, when discussing inclusion with teachers, teacher planning and planning time inevitably surface as an issue. With inclusion, not only do teachers struggle to find enough planning time during the work day, they must also learn to plan in teams of general and special educators, which is a new experience for many teachers. While adequate planning time is a widespread concern for teachers even apart from inclusion, many feel that it is even more important in inclusive classrooms, since "the [included] kids need to rely on the stability of a well prepared teacher."

Teacher planning time in inclusive classrooms is used to arrange what will be taught by whom and to map out how the special education teacher will function in the classroom. Teachers have found this common planning time beneficial not only for enhancing inclusive education, but also for helping teachers to "play off each other's strengths" and to learn new strategies for presenting and adapting the curriculum. Joint planning sessions have also provided teachers with an opportunity to "problem solve" about other students in the class who may be having difficulties. The teachers can then make adjustments to address the students' needs outside of the special education referral process.

In those instances where special education teachers are working with a number of general education teachers in a given school, teachers emphasize the need for the special education teachers' planning time to be as flexible as possible. Indeed, while some teachers highly value regularly scheduled planning times for general and special education teachers, this may not always be necessary. As one teacher pointed out:

> When we began inclusion, we scheduled joint planning time between me and the general education teachers. However, they resented using their planning time to meet with me so now we use a "natural" planning method, not structured. Basically, the special education teacher needs to be there when there is a problem. The special education teacher's planning time needs to be flexible.

One of the ways teachers have enhanced their ability to jointly plan is to have the classrooms and offices of inclusion teams physically close to each other, so that teachers are not spending precious planning time traversing the school building. In addition, in successful inclusion schools teachers meet with the principal prior

One High School Team's Struggles with Inclusion

When two high school teachers decided to dissolve their "Fundamental Skills" biology course (composed largely of students in special education) and integrate the students into the other biology classes, the initial results were discouraging. As the teachers described the situation, "Grade-wise, the kids bombed. There were times when we would look at each other and say, 'Why are we doing this?'" Included students reported feeling stupid and being afraid to ask questions, while the general education students were not tolerant of the special education students' "slowness." In addition, included students reported they felt isolated and out of place without their friends — the other students in special education who they had taken classes with since elementary school.

Though troubled by their first semester results, the teachers decided to press on rather than give up. They presented their findings to other teachers in their school and special education teachers across the district who were thinking about mainstreaming and inclusion, and they began to analyze their interview data to develop ideas for improving the success of learning disabled students during the next year.

Armed with a new cadre of instructional adaptations, the teachers began the next semester of their inclusive program. Instructional strategies now included more labs, hands-on activities, and classroom discussion and teacher explanations before beginning labs and other classroom assignments. That semester, although still acknowledging the "strangeness of being with new kids," special education students reported that the included class was "fine, there's nothing wrong. I like it." Even as students seemed more satisfied, the teachers reported that there was more work and more "thinking" taking place in the included, regular biology class than in the previous "Fundamentals" class.

In response to this and other inclusion activities at the school, the special education teacher noted, "I've kind of been sitting back in awe. The special ed kids in here are really holding their ground. They are doing well. We've done a lot of presentations, and they've stood right up with the [general education] kids next to them and participated."

And what did the teachers experience? First, as part of the school's overall reform efforts, the teachers had to struggle with the pressures of covering fewer topics in greater depth so that *all* students really understood the material, rather than covering several topics in a cursory fashion. Second, teachers had to raise their expectations for students in special education and overcome their concerns about managing an inclusive classroom. As one teacher described, "The large group seems to have its own control mechanism that keeps Johnny Joker from acting like Johnny Joker. I think it's because there's bound to be someone they want to impress." Third, the special education teacher underwent the "inclusion process" as well. The special education teacher had to learn how she could be helpful to teachers and all students as well as lose her special education label.

Source: I Feel Like I've Been Mainstreamed: A High School Teacher's Journey. The Holmes Group *Forum*.

to the school year to help determine the master building schedule to ensure that joint planning times are available. Overall, problems in finding and coordinating planning time seem to be more easily solved in buildings where faculty are accustomed to joint departmental planning times.

Creating joint planning time is also a process of compromise. In those buildings where general education teachers have been unwilling to compromise on their planning time, special education teachers can end up spending large amounts of time just moving from

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meeting to meeting rather than providing support and services to students.

Inclusive schools are generally successful in flexibly deploying specialists, support staff such as paraprofessionals, and volunteers in support of included students. In many instances support services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech and language services are offered directly in the general education classroom. Paraprofessionals previously assigned to work full-time in special education classrooms often "follow" students with disabilities back into general education classrooms *to support the entire class*, as well as the student with disabilities.

For those teachers who are team teaching in inclusive environments, setting up and maintaining the team teaching situation itself requires special attention. Teachers report that finding the right team teaching partner is as important as any aspect of planning for inclusion. Inclusive teachers caution that teachers must be very flexible in these situations as "team teaching for inclusion is not everyone's cup of tea." In fact, many inclusive teachers talk about team teaching as a "marriage" for the duration of the school year. As one teacher described it:

> Setting up a team teaching situation is like setting up a household. You have to decide which person is going to write which lesson plans, what will be the classroom rules, what the discipline procedures will be...how you will grade, who will keep up the grade books, who will grade papers, the policies on make-up work, and who will talk, at what time, at the parent conferences.

Inclusive teachers, working in a team teaching situation, report greater parent, student and professional satisfaction. Parents are happier to have more teachers working in and with the general class, thus reducing the student:teacher ratio during the periods of team teaching. Students are happier to be able to receive additional support from teachers, either with more small group work or individually. As one teacher explained, "In our class, while one teacher teaches, the other circulates." Teachers report professional satisfaction in breaking down the traditional, professionally isolating structure of schools in which each teacher works alone in the classroom without the benefit of feedback from other professionals. Teachers describe team teaching experiences as "rejuvenating" and "reinvigorating" after years of isolated classroom practice. At the same time, special education teachers report feeling truly part of the school staff in inclusive schools.

Instructional Adaptations

Inclusive teachers report several kinds of instructional adaptations they make in order to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Teacher descriptions of these changes are often the very types of instructional strategies that school reformers have been imploring teachers to use for the past several years. As one teacher described:

> We do a lot of group projects in our class, with a focus on hands-on learning for all students. This proved to be very reinforcing for some of the students in the class who were not classified for special ed. For some of these students, their past behaviors guaranteed that they were not allowed to participate in group projects. Actually, many of the students in special education were working on higher level work than the students in the class who were not classified for special education. With the changing population of students entering schools, [it's] still the same types of kids [actually in the class], they just change the names [of the disability categories or the special remedial programs]. Good teachers are constantly trying new ideas....The basics of good teaching are still there.

Teachers describe a range of classroom modifications. For instance, one teacher may make small adjustments in instruction for students with disabilities — telling them the page where they can find the answer to a question or assigning them a one-page report instead of a five-page report. Secondary teachers, in particular, describe more "project work" and encouraging students to talk about their problems rather than fighting out their differences with other students. Other teachers describe using "multi-modal" instructional approaches in which instruction is written at the same time it is spoken, using more manipulative materials in instruction, and using other sources of literature rather than relying on the basal reader or other textbook that is the mainstay of many classes.

Teachers report rearranging rooms so that all activities are accessible to students in wheelchairs, redeploying therapists so that they all deliver their instruction in the general classroom, and making things that are "visual" tactile for students who are blind. Early childhood and elementary teachers report setting aside a half hour each day to work on IEP objectives that aren't addressed in other classroom activities. Middle school and high school teachers report setting aside one afternoon a week for lab time when students can come for extra help.

To provide additional support, one school created a crisis intervention system. If three bells ring, the special education teacher is needed for intervention. However, as the special education teacher in that school further reported, "General education teachers need to learn that not all classroom problems are the result of inclusion."

Overall, special education teachers say that the most important aspect of their role in instruction is remaining very flexible. Two teachers described their day as follows:

> As a special education teacher, I have to be very accommodating; in some classes the general education teacher does primarily whole-class instruction while I assist individual students; or sometimes I rotate, teaching the chapters with the general education teacher....
>
> As a special education teacher, I no longer have my own class, I team with all teachers. I look at the IEP, come in and do hands-on activities. For me, scheduling becomes a big issue.

Many inclusive teachers now focus to a much greater extent on the development of social skills among their students. Again, the benefits of these exercises transcend the boundaries of a special education label. As one teacher described her class:

> We run social skills groups in my class two days a week....They have worked wonderfully. [The] kids got to talk about how they feel about things — not only inclusion. The kids talked about how "acting out kids" impacted others. This was backed up by the special education teacher, who discussed behavioral terms with the students and conducted role playing sessions. A big issue in our class this year was divorce.

RESPONDING TO TEACHER CONCERNS ABOUT INCLUSION

> *To tell you the truth, my biggest concern the year they began inclusion in the school was the new principal, not inclusion.*
>
> — Elementary school teacher

While many teachers have been instrumental in bringing inclusion to their schools, other teachers approach inclusion with caution. As reported earlier, much of the caution on the part of general education teachers has been due to their lack of exposure to students with disabilities. Some teachers are reluctant to share the territory of their classroom, or in some instances to dissolve their classroom to join with a special education classroom. Others fear that the support they need to include students successfully will not be provided by the system. Finally, some teachers simply oppose inclusion on philosophical grounds or because they do not believe the benefits will outweigh the additional effort needed to successfully implement inclusion.

In addition, since the traditional model of mainstreaming is based on the premise that students with disabilities must "earn" their way into a classroom to receive instruction largely without adaptations and support, teachers may have a limited understanding of how to work with other professionals to adapt instruction. This inexperience may cause teachers to doubt their own abilities to work with diverse students and result in initial negative feelings toward inclusion. In such instances, many principals have initially given teachers an option to participate in the inclusion program. In one such instance the principal told all teachers that they should participate to the level at which they were comfortable, and only one teacher in the whole school opted out. One teacher observed that

> most teachers, with education, come along....We started inclusion in this school by putting children

> in classrooms with receptive teachers. Now the teachers do not have a choice, they have to do it. Some of the teachers who were originally resistant have been eased into it by their general education peers. In some of the classes the general education teachers have ignored the included student. However, when the ignored student began to act out, the teacher realized that it was in her best interest to work with the student with disabilities.

Some teachers approach inclusion with caution because they are uncomfortable having other professionals working with them in their classroom. For many teachers, both in general and special education, inclusion provides them with their first opportunity to work side-by-side with other professionals. In addition, the system of special education can be very daunting to a general education teacher. An elementary teacher said that

> building-based planning teams can be as intimidating to regular education teachers as they are to parents, what with all of the "specialists" lined up on the other side of the table. I didn't know what to do with a student and it was hard to admit that. Also, in instances where the parent is interviewing teachers to assist in the classroom placement for the upcoming year, the general education teachers feel that it had a "beauty contest" aura.

For these teachers, special care must be taken to help them feel comfortable with some of the trappings of special education. Other inclusive teachers in the school are instrumental in talking to their peers to assure them that no one has "all of the answers" and that all teachers are struggling with the same sorts of educational problems with youngsters. Also, in some instances the building principal provides extra incentives for participating teachers. As described by one special education teacher, "when the principal provides extra incentives for teachers who are creating inclusive classrooms, the other teachers feel left out and 'join in' after a year or two." As with all successful education reforms, trust must exist between professionals in order for change to be successful.

Some special education teachers fear becoming obsolete, losing their classrooms, and being marginalized by general education teachers. To counter this, other teachers and building principals should work with special education teachers to assure them that their services are needed and that *teachers do not lose their jobs over inclusion.* Inclusion, done properly, requires every teacher, paraprofessional and support service that a separate system requires. In addition, many special education teachers characterize inclusion as being one of their most professionally rewarding experiences. They report "losing their label" just as their students do. And one of the added benefits of inclusion is that restructuring an entire school for inclusion often results in smaller class sizes overall.

Some teachers oppose inclusion because they feel that the support they need will evaporate within a year or two, if it is ever supplied in the first place. In addition, some principals have used the term inclusion to justify other student grouping practices — such as teaming two teachers to work with all of the students labeled "learning disabled" as well with students who, without being labeled for special education, are known to have behavior problems. In general, however, teachers who work in teams for inclusion report that the teaming process itself lends support; that is, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In addition, as mentioned above, many of the adaptations that are made by inclusive teachers can be made within the normal course of instruction. In those schools that practice cooperative learning strategies, many of the teachers are accustomed to heterogeneous grouping and are well prepared for inclusion. However, teachers, parents and building administrators must remain vigilant to ensure that resources follow each student back into the general education classroom. In no instance should the fear of losing resources or support be used as an excuse not to provide a student with disabilities an inclusive environment. In fact, to do so is a violation of that student's right to a free and appropriate public education.

One note of caution should be added concerning support: as disastrous as no support can be, it is also possible for students to be "over-supported." In some cases, children with moderate and severe disabilities move to an inclusive setting along with a full-time classroom aide. In some of these instances, the aide is used exclusively as an assistant to the child labeled with

a disability — at times even having a student desk for the aide placed next to the disabled student's desk. These "included" students often become "bubble children," placed in a classroom in which they do not interact with other students, interacting only with the assigned aide. In essence they have been resegregated, and the benefit of having a classroom aide to support the inclusion of the student is not realized by the teacher, the other students in the classroom, *nor the student with the disability*. With classroom support must come the proper training to help teachers learn how to use the classroom support they receive.

Finally, there are those teachers who simply do not want to include students with disabilities in the general programs. Teachers caution that no one who is reluctant should do inclusion. In some instances, teachers who do not want to teach inclusively are given the option to transfer to another school with no penalty. For the most part, teachers report that their colleagues who persistently do not wish to teach inclusively are usually those who are the least flexible on the staff overall. As two inclusive teachers said:

> It has been extremely difficult to work with the teachers who oppose inclusion in our school — but it is hard to work with them, regardless of inclusion. They are generally inflexible. You can't force a teacher to change. Fortunately, only a couple of people are difficult to work with, while the majority of teachers are willing to include students in their class....

> Everyone in our school has been very positive; those that are not happy with it probably left.

Again, as teachers meet students with disabilities and see them as children and youth first; as teachers are rejuvenated working in classrooms with their peers; and as teachers see improved outcomes for students with and without disabilities, they become "sold" on inclusion.

For most teachers, student outcomes are the bottom line for inclusion. Teachers report that inclusion has helped the other students in the class because there is more individualized attention through the modified instructional techniques used with all students. As one teacher stated, "*Everybody's* grades are better and the students complete more of their outside assignments. In addition, the kids don't have the stigma of going to a special education class." As teachers report, and research has borne out, there are no negative effects on the academic achievement of the other students in the class, and "the growth of the special education kids enhances the whole class." Teachers report fewer students being retained or socially promoted in inclusive schools; through enhanced motivation and alternative instructional strategies, students earned the grades they received. In some instances, teachers report that the best student helpers and peer tutors for students with disabilities were those students who were themselves suffering from low self-esteem.

Notes on Inclusion from a Special Education Teacher to Special Education Teachers

You need to be flexible;
Some teachers will need a shoulder to cry on;
Some teachers will need a pat on the back;
Sometimes you need to do all the work at the beginning;
In some classes you will melt into the woodwork;
In some classes you will team teach, in some you will ad lib;
You need to believe very firmly in what you are doing.

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IMPLICATIONS OF INCLUSION FOR TEACHERS

Teaching in inclusive environments represents a drastic change for many teachers who have been trained and worked in a dual system of special and general education. In addition, inclusion, as part of overall school reform efforts, seeks to alter the norm of isolated practice among teachers by requiring general and special education teachers to plan and work together in support of the needs of all students. As reported above, while many teachers are supportive of inclusion, many approach inclusion with caution. It is important that the concerns of cautious teachers be addressed so that the seeds of doubt, fear and mistrust do not grow into poor educational experiences for children and youth.

For teachers to fully assist in creating inclusive classrooms a number of key issues must be taken into consideration, including teacher perceptions of students with disabilities; the manner of involvement in the planning and implementation process; teacher training and planning for inclusion; the social and emotional responses that teachers have toward inclusion; and finally, teachers' attitudes toward the change process itself.

- **The foundation of inclusion is to realign teacher thinking about students with disabilities and students in general.** Teachers report that in order to successfully create inclusive schools, they first had to adjust their language. That is, they no longer spoke in terms of "your kids" and "my kids," but rather spoke about "their kids" or the "[school name] kids" to reinforce the notion that the school is a community first, in which all teachers assume responsibility for all students. Along with this change in language, teachers — both general and special education — reported shifting their thinking about students with disabilities to a more "normal" versus "abnormal" paradigm. That is, teachers came to believe that instructional practices that are good for all students are good for students with disabilities as well, rather than thinking that students with disabilities automatically need a separate, special curriculum with separate, special instructional practices. Teachers in successful inclusive settings used the general curriculum as the basis of instruction, making adjustments as needed, rather than starting with the deficit model of special education and trying to teach skills and objectives isolated from their environment. As teachers shifted their thinking, many felt the need to rewrite IEP objectives and to search for new ways to assess student learning. One teacher commented that

> [since] standardized tests don't even begin to tap what the kids know, I have to be flexible in evaluation. Also, those tests never tap areas such as "humanitarianism," civic responsibility and civic values.

- **Teachers should be involved in every phase of the planning and implementation process.** Teachers who are not involved in the planning process for inclusion are more likely to feel that they have been put upon, forced or otherwise coerced into creating an inclusive school rather than being an active participant in the process. Teachers repeatedly report the necessity to ensure that no one feels *forced* to include students with disabilities in the general education program. The best way to avoid this is to ensure that all building teachers are kept abreast of inclusion developments and have an opportunity to freely ask any question they might have regarding inclusion and students with disabilities. Teachers themselves are the best avenue of communication with their peers on the benefits of inclusion and classroom strategies that work. In addition, building administrators must be mindful that teaming for an entire school year with another teacher requires a very close working relationship between the team members. To the extent feasible, principals should honor the requests of teachers for teaming partners. Teachers are in the best position to determine with which teachers their instructional styles are most compatible.

- **Teachers should be provided with the ability to plan and problem solve on a daily basis.** Many building and district administrators are spending inordinate amounts of time in preplacement "special education" training of general education teachers and, once the student has been placed in an inclusive school, withdrawing training support from teachers. Yet based on teachers' self-reported training needs, this may be exactly backward. That is, teachers report needing more time for problem solving and brainstorming *after* students have been placed in inclusive environments.

In addition, these teachers report, much of the preplacement training they received only "made sense" to them *after* students were included.

Teachers working in teams also report needing to have some initial planning time above what might be needed as the school year ensues, in order to hammer out the "nitty-gritty" issues associated with team teaching, such as classroom rules, approaches to classroom management, student discipline, and who will say what, when during class and at teacher conferences.

Finally, when teachers are afforded opportunities for professional development, teachers report that training in cooperative learning techniques, peer coaching and other instructional strategies seem to be the most productive ways to help teachers work with all students, including those with disabilities.

- **Teachers should be provided the opportunity to validate their emotional responses and the social consequences of inclusion on them as individuals.** The structure of the special education system can be very daunting to a general education teacher and may produce doubt in the minds of some teachers regarding their efficacy with students. At the same time, some special education teachers may outwardly express doubts about the ability of inclusion to improve students' outcomes, when their underlying concerns are actually related to anxieties about employment, loss of professional identity and the prospect of change. For either type of teacher, when students are placed out of a separate special education classroom or not placed with a particular general education teacher, the teachers may acquire a feeling of rejection that, if unchecked, could grow into resentment and mistrust. Teachers must be provided forums to discuss these issues openly and have their concerns addressed. Foremost, parents, administrators and fellow teachers must assure inclusive teachers that feeling intimidated and having self-doubts are normal reactions to change, restructuring, and inclusion.

- **Teachers need assistance in coping with the change process itself in order to create successfully restructured, inclusive schools.** Teacher after teacher reports that the key to successful inclusion is flexibility and an ability to work in a changing environment. Those teachers who "taught the same subject, in the same way, year after year" seem to be those who have the most difficulty moving to an inclusive paradigm for instruction. Teachers use words such as "flexible," "open," and "learning" when describing an inclusive environment. Teachers advise that the best equipment for inclusion is to be armed with a good sense of humor and not be afraid of the unknown. This is a radical approach for a profession that is used to receiving a "teacher proof" curriculum and has few support systems for professional learning. Building administrators report an increased need to discuss the change process with teachers so they can recognize it for what it is and reduce the anxiety they feel as a result of change. Most importantly, specific training in the process of change can reaffirm for all involved that reforming education and creating inclusive schools is a process of successive approximations during which there will, inevitably, be some successes and some failures.

IV. THE FAMILY'S ROLE IN CREATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

When parents are asked what goals they have for their children with disabilities, their response, as one parent said, is that "our goals are no different for our children with disabilities than they are for our other children." Parents want all their children to grow up to be happy, contributing members of society, able to interact with the community, to feel good about themselves, and to be valued by others. ***On a day to day basis, parents want their children with disabilities to go to school with a smile and develop the language, academic and social skills necessary to prepare them for the future.***

Given these goals, why do parents want their children included? First, parents describe the special education experience as one that is not geared toward developing adults who are integral members of their community. One parent pointed out that, "My son was supposed to work on language skills while sitting in a segregated special education placement in which none of his peers had normal language skills. He had no role models." Similarly, parents who want their children included feel that it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop social skills in the absence of "regular" peers. However, parents warn that "being *kind* to my kid isn't enough; they [general education teachers] need to *teach* my kid as well." Parents look for improved academic outcomes for their included children.

Parents who want their children included are beginning to question the very premise of special education. As many researchers have pointed out, special education is based on a deficit paradigm in which professionals seek to find "defects" in students based on a set sequence of "normal" development (Gartner and Lipskey, 1989, Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989). Yet emerging theories in general education about how children acquire knowledge are based on a much less prescriptive notion of instruction, recognizing that there are multiple ways that students learn (Gardner, 1993) and that learning does not necessarily follow a strict sequential pattern (Slavin, 1990). As one parent described, "For fifteen years people said, 'What's wrong with him?' After fifteen years, [now that he's in an inclusive setting] they finally say, 'What can he do?'"

> *I would like to see a day when we didn't have to make a big deal about this [inclusion], that everyone thought that kids with disabilities belonged in school.*
>
> — Parent of a student with disabilities

Parents who want their children included also point out the out-of-school needs for children to belong to the regular school and class. Parents cite the need to "make other kids feel comfortable around their children with disabilities" so that people in the community won't be afraid of their children when they grow to be adults with disabilities. Parents of included students describe their children as having friends in the community for the first time, as "belonging to the community" for the first time, and as feeling as if *they* (as parents) belong to the community as well.

Successful inclusion requires leadership, planning, and constant communication with school officials to ensure successful experiences for parents and their children.

Leadership

Parents have been instrumental in getting inclusion started in their schools and districts. Through their advocacy for their own child and advocacy for all students with disabilities in a district, parents have often been the impetus behind a building or district even beginning to consider inclusion.

Parents provide leadership by passing along their experiences to other parents in the district who want their children included. In essence, parents train their peers in how to negotiate the particular rules, regulations and procedures of the district in order to successfully have their child included. In this way, the inclusion of one student can provide the foundation for others to be included. As parents report, "It's hard to be first but it pays off — the next person won't have to work so hard."

Parents report much of the work behind having their children included boiled down to pointing out to school officials where a particular policy had an exclusionary impact on students with disabilities. Yet some districts are very reluctant to include students with disabilities into the general program. Parents report being told *"no one has ever asked for that [inclusion] before,"* as reluctant administrators use a "divide and conquer" strategy with individual families to deny their request for inclusion. In these instances, parents report that only an organized group of requests from a larger number of parents will be given serious consideration.

Many of the first parents to have their children included have subsequently spearheaded the effort in their district to organize other parents interested in having their children included in the regular program. These parents have run parent support meetings, sat in IEP meetings with their peers, and made presentations to the school board when necessary. Some of these parents have worked through the district's special education advisory committee to have their voices heard, some have not.

Parents report undertaking several leadership roles to support the implementation of inclusion. For instance, while a district will frequently have a task force or planning commission at the elementary or middle school level to initiate inclusion, parents are usually the ones who point out the need for such a planning committee at the high school level as well, where educators have implemented inclusion to a lesser extent. Indeed, through their networks parents can ensure that planning teams are created in *every* school building in a district in order to foster *systemic* change, rather than changing the system one student at a time.

Unfortunately, some parents feel that they have to "keep up the fight" every new school year to keep their child included as he or she progresses through the grades. In many instances school administrators have provided staff with thorough and adequate training for inclusion for the first year(s) a child is included, but have not maintained that level of training in the following years. In these districts, the struggle is especially great when the student progresses to the next level school, e.g., from elementary to middle school. In such districts, teachers at higher grade levels may not understand inclusion and erroneously think that the child will be "mainstreamed" without support in the general education classroom. Parents often need to work with teachers to ensure the necessary levels of support and teacher training for inclusion from year to year.

Many parents take the lead in conducting disability awareness sessions in their child's school. As one parent reported, "Ninety percent of the issues they have faced [in inclusion] were awareness issues." Parents have facilitated classroom meetings in which students are free to ask questions about the student with disabilities, parents have arranged for disability awareness programs sponsored by advocacy organizations, and in some instances parents have conducted staff development sessions on disability awareness. Again, parents describe their peer networks as helpful in coordinating such programs.

Finally, parents exercise leadership by providing forums for publicly thanking teachers for including children with disabilities. Parents know that including children with disabilities into the general education classroom is a drastic change for many teachers who have been trained and reinforced throughout their careers to expect that students with disabilities are properly "sent away" for instruction. In some instances the encouragement and support from parents is the only outside recognition that teachers receive. Recognition for their efforts when it is deserved is well appreciated and can also help elicit cooperation from other teachers less willing to include students with disabilities.

PLANNING FOR INCLUSION

This study repeatedly stresses the importance of including a wide range of groups in the planning process for inclusion — and it is certainly essential for parents to be directly involved. Parents know their child's behavior out of school and in different situations. Parental involvement in planning is especially critical for newly included students, since the special education personnel frequently have not had an opportunity to observe such students in a "normal" environment with non-disabled peers. Parents can give the teacher a sense of what to expect of their child in terms of behavior and achievement.

The parents' role in planning for inclusion should be just as significant as their role in planning the yearly IEP. Successful planning begins before the change in placement that occurs the first year a child is included, continues with every IEP, and includes monitoring the system after the child is included. As one parent said, *"planning is ongoing — issues change and the kids change from year to year."* Parents can be instrumental in ensuring that all who need to be are brought to the planning table, such as the school counselor, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and other support staff in the school.

Parents can ensure consistency in planning across grades and from elementary to middle to high school. Parents in many districts express concern that the logistics of inclusion have not been thought through in the high school to the extent they should be. These parents report a "big difference" between the elementary and secondary levels in terms of how students are viewed, how parent participation is viewed, and how willing teachers are to make accommodations for students with disabilities. In many ways this relates to the old adage that *"elementary teachers teach children, high school teachers teach subjects."* When planning at the high school level has not been complete, parents become fearful for the safety of their children. In such cases, they may even trade away an inclusive education for their child in order to ensure safety. That is, parents would rather have their child remain in a segregated environment than go to school in an inclusive environment where the entire building was not supportive of inclusion, for fear that without adequate planning and supervision their child would be abused by other students.

At a minimum, because of the different expectations for students in high school, planning must be more thorough and communication ongoing between parents and educators at this level. For example, one parent reported that in an attempt to "scare her off," school officials told her that there were many potential hazards awaiting her mentally retarded daughter at the high school should she be included. The parent responded by reminding school officials that they were responsible for the safety of her daughter while in school. When students in the girl's class were going to the library unattended, the classroom teacher refused to let the included student go along under the pretense that *"I [the classroom teacher] cannot be responsible for you there."* Thorough planning and strong channels of communication can help reduce the likelihood that such incidents will occur.

BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT

Thorough planning and strong lines of communication are the foundation for building a mutually trusting and respectful relationship between parents and educators. As with any aspect of education, both parents and teachers need to feel that they can work *together* to support children. Unfortunately, when it comes to parents of students with disabilities, many teachers have preconceived notions of how "unrealistic" these parents are, how "demanding" they are, or how "generally uncooperative" they are as a group. Often "just [the act of] organizing parents can be perceived as threatening" to teachers. Parents must work at breaking down these stereotypes.

From the school's perspective, teachers report parents of included students who have so little trust in the school that they are continually looking to "catch" the school doing something inappropriate with their child. Schools may become suspicious of parents who just "drop in" on their child's class, instead of making an appointment to observe the classroom. In addition, many districts *have* experienced parents who have inappropriately determined that the best way to advocate for inclusion is to "spy" on teachers,

take an antagonistic posture with the school, and even form negative "advocacy" groups, with such names as the "Mothers from Hell." Such negative behavior breeds contempt on both sides and creates an "us versus them" mentality that is liable to linger within the school long after the offending parents have moved on.

On the other hand, it has been many parents' experience that not all principals or teachers are willing to include students with disabilities. Parents report that "some teachers don't want our kids," and as a result will resist including children or providing appropriate programs and supports to included children. According to one mother, "some parents think that just because a school says they are going to do something that they are going to do it. I had to learn the hard way that it doesn't always work that way." At the extreme, parent advocacy groups have noted that parents who "cause the district too much trouble" have been reported to social services for child abuse by the school system as a way of harassing the parents.

Whether the antagonism originates at the school or with the parent, it is likely that the seeds of mistrust were sown long ago through poor communication and misunderstanding that grew to open animosity. Parents can play a critical role in developing and maintaining strong, consistent and positive lines of communication between the family and school personnel. Such communication is most effective when it begins *before* the child is included. For instance, many parents report needing to make sure that the teachers' expectations for their child are high enough. Yet if such goals are not communicated clearly by the family, many general education teachers may be more apprehensive of parents' expectations than they are of actually including students with disabilities in their classes. As one parent recalled, "We didn't all calm down until I told the teacher, 'I know you can't fix my kid.'" Another parent reported that, at her initiative, she meets with general education teachers before her son is included to brief them on her son's behaviors, skills and talents, and the teachers then feel much more comfortable working with him.

One way trust breaks down between parents and teachers is that when parents ask teachers how their child is doing, many teachers feel a need to report some negatives in order to demonstrate areas where they are working with the individual student for improvement. Thus, parents tell of instances where their child may bring home papers week after week with a "plus" or "smile face," but when the first parent-teacher conference takes place, the teacher's report seems very negative. Understanding this "negative report" phenomenon will help smooth parent-teacher communication. In addition, establishing a weekly reporting mechanism can ensure that there are no big surprises that can turn into "trust-busters" at mid-year. One parent even reported initiating a daily notebook reporting system between home and school so that the teacher and family could briefly communicate each day.

Parents can play a particularly critical role in linking general and special educators. Teachers generally work in a professionally isolated environment in which each teacher works in his or her own classroom with very few opportunities built into the school day to discuss, plan and interact with other professionals in the school building. In many districts general education teachers are not even involved in a child's IEP conference because of scheduling constraints. In these instances, parents can provide the crucial link between general and special education. When meeting with general education teachers, parents can relate adaptations that have been used successfully with their child in a special education environment.

INCLUSION IN THE COMMUNITY

> *"If you don't exist in the school, you don't exist. Being included in someone else's school [not the student's neighborhood school] doesn't mean garbage for inclusion in the community. Much [of community life] stems from the school."*
>
> — Parent of included high school student

Parents repeatedly report that as their children are accepted into the neighborhood school, their children were also accepted into the community. In fact, parents report that having a child included in the neighborhood school actually provides a type of validation of the child and family that is difficult for a family to obtain outside of the school. "Once the school puts the stamp of approval on a kid [by including them]," one parent

explained, "then your kid is okay in the community as well." Another parent noted, "When the child is included in the neighborhood school, the family is included in the community."

Making friends in school is a vital, natural part of every student's development. Many of the social activities that students are engaged in after school actually originate through friendships developed during school hours. Inclusion plays a major role in ensuring that students with disabilities are able to make those in-school friendships with other children from their own community. According to one parent:

> My daughter plays with the neighborhood kids after school now. Before she was included, she was never invited to a birthday party just by herself, she was only invited with her brother. Now she is invited to parties herself.

Parents have also found that inclusion in school can have an exponential impact on the inclusion of students in the community. "The less you hide the kids, the more it changes," one parent said. "People used to only say hello and goodbye to her when they saw her out of school. Now they stop to talk to her." As neighbors and other members of the community become used to seeing children, youth and adults in the community, they become increasingly comfortable with their presence and, in turn, begin to treat people with disabilities as they would treat any other member of the community. Adults with disabilities who discuss their own segregated educational experiences reflect upon social isolation out of school as possibly the most negative aspect of segregated special education.

Parents warn, however, that it is not a perfect world. One parent noted, "I have kids over to our house to play, but they [the children's parents] don't reciprocate." Another said, "All of these kids are terribly lonely. [My son] is included in the community, but not at all levels — face it, the cheerleaders aren't going to go out with him." Many times parents also have to assume leadership roles outside of the school to ensure that their child is included in the community. One parent reported that she always has her son get after-school jobs to stay visible in the community and to further enhance his socialization skills. Another said that in order to have her daughter enrolled in an inclusive Brownie troop, she (the mother) had to become the troop leader. In that way, the mother could structure the troop activities so that "what was wrong with her [daughter] doesn't show."

Parents also report that as their children begin to age out of school, they unfortunately tend to return to a more segregated social life. Many communities have few, if any, structured social events for adults, and it is often difficult for people with disabilities to remain as visible in the community after they leave school as young adults.

BENEFITS TO PARENTS AS WELL AS TO THEIR INCLUDED CHILDREN

Research has shown that including students with disabilities in the general school program benefits not only the student, but the entire family. As noted in the previous section, as children are allowed back into their neighborhood schools and begin to attend the regular classroom, their families are also accepted into the community. In addition, research has shown that parents of included students are likely to have more positive expectations for their disabled children (CRI, 1992). Parents report that as their children are included, the parents themselves develop a wider circle of friends — that is, they develop more friendships with parents of children without disabilities (Bailey & Winton, 1989).

Finally, parents report that inclusion can change the very dynamics of a family. Parents said that while their children had previously been ashamed if a sibling went to "that special school," they were now "proud" of their included brother or sister. Similarly, parents tell of relatives who once felt awkward around or ignored a child with a disability, but who begin to directly interact with the child after he or she is included. As one mother reported, "[my son] is really seen as part of the family now."

OTHER STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO INCLUSION

Many parents, as well as school officials, are concerned with how the general student population in the school will react to included students. Research has shown that inclusion has also been beneficial to general

An "Inclusion" Christmas Letter

Christmas 1994

Dear Friends,

Surprise. Surprise. The Pauleys' had another great year. In many ways this was Cecelia's best year to date. She blossomed in school and in her personal life. Once again she was fully included in regular classes in her home high school and she got four A's second semester last year, including an A in English, and in the first quarter this year. She was in the school chorus again and went with them on an overnight bus trip to Disney World to sing at a national competition.... On her 17th birthday one of the football players gave her a birthday card on which he had written, "Cecelia, Thanks for being such a terrific friend. You always know how to cheer everyone up. Keep on smiling." He then got 58 other kids to sign messages on the card and they presented it to her at lunch as they sang "Happy Birthday." Last year the captain of the soccer team wrote about her on his college applications as the person he admires most. He ended his essay by saying, "Cecelia is inspirational to me because she maintains a positive attitude despite her many obstacles. She remains on task despite being surrounded by people of much greater skill and ability. She demonstrates that within each of us there is potential waiting to be tapped to enable one to excel beyond expectation."

Inclusion really is a "win-win" situation. Cecelia has matured so much in the two years she has been included that groups began to invite her to be a guest speaker. In March she was the luncheon speaker at a regional Downs Syndrome conference, and in July she was the keynote speaker at an international conference on inclusion. She has been the dinner speaker at several service clubs, and has testified before the Board of Education, the County Council, and a U.S. Department of Education panel....The down side to her year were two back operations to straighten out a severe case of scoliosis (78 degree curvature of the spine). She is now in a body brace and probably will remain in it for a year. In spite of that she maintains her great spirit and conquers everything that comes up. Two colleges have accepted her after she graduates from high school and she will apply to a couple of others. This was unthinkable ten years ago and now it is a reality. Unbelievable....

The Pauleys
Montgomery County, Maryland

education students. For instance, studies have shown that general education peers in an included environment become more accepting of people with disabilities overall and more accepting of students with disabilities in particular (Voeltz, 1980, 1982; Kishi, 1988; Evans, et al., 1992, and CRI 1992). In addition, students from the general school population have been found to actually increase their ability to apply problem-solving skills to real-life situations (Salisbury & Palombaro, 1993), increase their tolerance of other people (Peck, Donaldson & Pezzoli, 1990), and enhance their social status with their peers through their involvement with students with disabilities (Sasso & Rude, 1988).

Parents typically report that fellow students are supportive, accepting and nurturing. However, students are curious and need their questions answered. Parents report highly successful placements where teachers, parents and other school officials openly answer students' questions about a disability, about student behavior, and about classroom adaptations that are made. Parents also note that the younger students

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are when introduced to students with disabilities, the less frightened they are of them, and the more natural it seems that students with disabilities are in the class.

An included child's peers can be an integral part of the inclusion process by providing social supports to students in the school environment. Programs have been developed for included students that incorporate their general education peers in creating a supportive social environment. One such program is the Circle of Friends.

Circle of Friends is a structured method in which a group of general education students volunteer to become the "circle of friends" for a student with significant disabilities who otherwise may not have friends. The Circle holds a brainstorming session with parents, teachers and others on how to include the student with disabilities in the normal social activities appropriate for the individual's age group, whether it be birthday parties for elementary-aged students, bowling for middle school students or rock concerts for high school students. Circle members coordinate their interactions to create a normal flow of friendship and activities for students who often have only gone to a special class during the day and socialized with adults outside of school. In addition, the friends provide same-age companionship and comraderie in school and often will help a student with disabilities negotiate social situations in school with other peers outside of the Circle. An important facet of this program is the strong role that the general education students play in setting up the program and coordinating activities.

PROBLEMS WITH INCLUSION

Many families and students with disabilities report very successful inclusive placements. Parents have reported that with the appropriate supports and services, their children made phenomenal academic and social strides in a normal school environment, in their neighborhood school. However, parents also note the significant struggle that they have had in some schools and districts in achieving a successful inclusive environment.

Often overlooked is the burden that inclusion can place on parents, particularly those parents who must struggle with the local district to have their child included. As one parent reported:

> My child has had to prove herself every step of the way. [For example], after she was included in her class, they wouldn't let her into the cafeteria until she could prove that she could open a milk carton....I feel like every morning I send the message to my child that "I had to work hard to get you into this [regular] class, so don't blow it." This is draining and unfair to my daughter.

Another parent added:

> A lot of us have made our children the guinea pigs to force the system toward inclusion. We suffer guilt because of that. In addition, if the teachers get angry,[1] your neighbors get angry at you too.

Some parents report special education teachers as their biggest obstacle to inclusion. **It is unclear whether it is the teacher *per se* that creates the obstacle to inclusion or whether parents just identify teachers because they are the school personnel parents interact with most frequently.** Parents report special education teachers unwilling to "let go" of students with disabilities as well as a phenomenon described by parents as the "Annie Sullivan Complex," where special education teachers see themselves a "saviors" of special children rather than teachers helping students become maximally independent adults.

Parents also report that general education teachers who do not want to include children with disabilities will try to "scare" parents or ensure an unsuccessful experience to scare other parents away. Parents report some educators treating included students in a subtle, degrading way. "The teachers try to tell you [the parent] 'your kid won't get anything out of it.'"

In addition to teacher attitudes and beliefs, parents report that some teachers are not prepared to make adaptations. Some teachers perceive that the classroom

[1] When staff are not provided adequate support, they can become angry at the parent and student instead of focusing their efforts on obtaining more support from the district.

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aide is the only one who is supposed to be teaching the student with disabilities. Aides are not trained teachers, yet they can be put into the position of developing curricula and instructional adaptations for included students. In addition, by working exclusively with the included student, the aide can, in effect, isolate an included student from his or her classmates so that the included student might as well be in a segregated environment.

Parental inconsistencies can also create problems when trying to include students with disabilities in the general program. For example, many parents feel ambivalent about their child with a disability — that is, they want the child to be both "special" and the "same." In addition, as students get older parents report increased anxiety about their children's vulnerability to being taken advantage of or abused, as well as about handling the adolescent's sexuality and puberty in an "unprotected" environment. In this instance parents may want their teenage son or daughter to be included, but want to place so many restrictions on the student's movement that the student remains, in effect, in a very restrictive environment. This can confuse and frustrate educators trying to work with families to develop a program that satisfies the concerns of parents while meeting the needs of the student — and can result in resistance from the school and resentment on the part of parents. In addition, any given district may have some parents who are fighting to have their children included at the same time as other parents may be fighting to have their children put in more restrictive, segregated placements. This also can be very confusing to school officials and teachers.

Fortunately, as inclusion becomes more prevalent, parents will find that the pioneering families in the inclusion movement will have cleared away many of these obstacles.

ISSUES FOR PARENTS TO CONSIDER REGARDING INCLUSION

- **Have clear, straightforward communication patterns and mechanisms, and be clear about what issues you wish to communicate to the school.** Be aggressive, but polite and reasonable. Know what you are entitled to and have a positive attitude. Overall, parents report less communication with teachers in general education than they were accustomed to in special education. Parents should recognize that general education teachers are working with many more families than special education teachers. An extra effort will have to be made to maintain satisfactory communication levels without placing an undue burden on the general education teacher. Communication should be written, verbal, formal and informal, and with *both* general and special educators.

- **Form a parent group, both in the school and in the community, to plan goals and present issues in a package to the district to get inclusion going on a district-wide basis.** This is also is a way for individual families to know that they are not the only ones who want their children included.

- **To the maximum extent possible, get yourself "known" at school in a positive light.** It is easier to work in a nonthreatening, collaborative way with school officials and teachers if you have had an opportunity to get to know them outside of the IEP meeting. For families who have other children attending the school, this may be easier; however, all parents should strive to contribute to the good of the entire school through the PTA, school fund-raisers, and other school planning committees.

- **Show teachers that you appreciate the work they are doing with your child.** Inclusion is change and change is not easy. Simple gestures to teachers — both general and special education — to let them know you appreciate what they are doing can go a long way in terms of acceptance of your child as well as other included students to follow. In addition, some parent groups have given teachers special awards during a PTA meeting or another school function in recognition of their work. Other parent groups organize teacher appreciation luncheons at the end of the year or recognize teachers in parent newsletters. In some schools the "sympathetic" or "willing" teachers may be the only staff to include students with disabilities. These teachers are pioneers along with the parents, and deserve special recognition and appreciation.

- **Change your language from "special" and "general" education to a "range of options."** This also helps to diffuse the battle that is often waged between the parents of students labeled gifted and talented, who often want segregated placements for their children, and parents of students with disabilities, who want their children included. In addition, parents advise that the best strategy is to push for the maximum amount of inclusion possible for a child, rather than slowly "build up" to inclusion. Then if the placement is not working, it is possible to try other options. "It is easier to push forward and back off if you have to," a parent said, "than it is to [slowly] push forward from segregation."

- **Parents need to open their minds to the possibility that inclusion could benefit their child.** Parents, as with teachers, may not want to change due to a fear of the unknown or a reluctance to give up a system that has, after all, provided access to schooling in a safe environment for millions of children. Yet "access" is not the same as "the best possible outcome." One parent taking part in a computer bulletin board dialogue on inclusion expressed how her feelings about inclusion had changed once her daughter was involved:

> After reading some of the notes [on the bulletin board], I am feeling extremely fortunate that we live in the school district and the state that we do! My daughter is 10 years old and has attended a "regular" elementary school for the past four years. She was, and is, part of an inclusion program that went into effect four years ago. She is severely physically disabled, has no communication skills (yet) and has been labeled as profoundly retarded. Yet she has excelled in this school and in this program. She has never been made fun of or laughed at while with the other students and has, in fact, made friends, been invited to birthday parties, etc. She spends about half of her day in regular classes but is pulled out for physical therapy, occupational therapy, communication, etc. She participated in adapted physical education. Although she is unable to feed herself, she goes into the lunchroom with other girls her own age to "socialize." She participates in the field trips taken by the 4th grade and has been invited to the homes of her classmates. These are all activities and experiences that I thought she would never be a part of, but because of inclusion, she has had the opportunity to experience them. No, she hasn't miraculously learned to read and write, but if I had been given a choice four years ago, I would have resisted her being involved. Who would have been the loser then?

- **Parents should be aware of how the makeup of their community may affect their district's reaction to inclusion.** Parents of included students who have had to relocate to new communities reported that those schools with more diversity in their student population seemed to be more accepting of their children — that is, being different was more normal in those schools. In contrast, parents moving to schools that are more homogeneous racially and culturally have found it much more difficult to have their children included.

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NASBE wishes to thank the following individuals for their assistance in formulating this report:

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The following students were interviewed:

Leslie Allen
Darryl Andrews
Leigh Andrews
Jared Beyer
Nora Brew
Rachel Buckingham
Peter Corbino
Michelle Czirjak
Jaimi Fitzgerald
Laura Genovese
Shannon Goold
Bobby Griffithe
Nathan Hamms
Eric Jacobs
Lindsay Knapp
Maggie Kuhn
Alex Miller
Christina Pagano
Whitney Pollock
Sarah Romer
Chris Ruotola
Brittany Templer
Stefanie Williams
Jennifer Wright
Susy Yates

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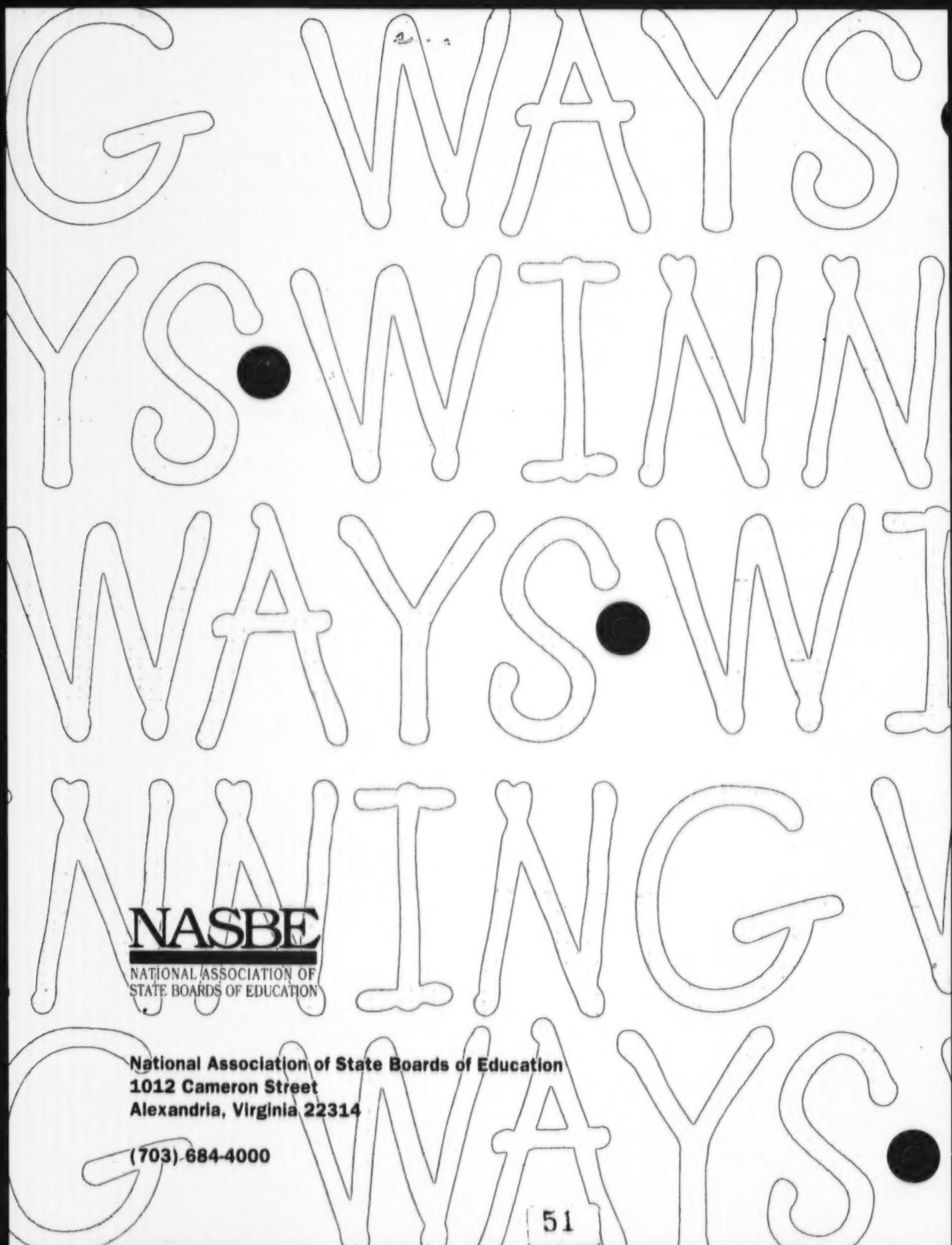

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